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# OMEN OF THE FALLING STARS

OR

A MAID OF IRAN

An authentic and intensely dramatic tale

BY

M. DEMETRIUS

in collaboration with

J. G. DEMETRIUS

*Member, Royal Exchange, etc. Calcutta.*



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Printed by  
S. K. DUTT, M.Sc.  
at The Protiva Press,  
38/2, Wellington Street,  
Calcutta.

Price Rs. 2/4/-

Published by •  
J. G. DEMETRIUS  
15, Clive Row,  
Calcutta.

## FOREWORD

This narrative has resulted from impressions received and from recollections that came to me, during two stages of my life. One when as a child I was a witness to every incident that took place and in which circumstances compelled me to take an active part : the other when I had arrived at mature years and was able in consequence to more clearly picture out in my mind, those scenes and events that had passed before me.

In those instances where I had received only faint impressions, fresh light was later thrown on them by such friends and relatives of mine as had lived in Iran and travelled over the same route as myself, as also by my husband who has jointly with me written this story.

We have to acknowledge our indebtedness to certain standard works of reference and to a number of other authoritative works, all of which we have diligently consulted in order to verify certain facts and events connected with that fascinating land of Iran.

Some imperfections may exist in this narrative, for which we beg the reader's indulgence.

Our thanks are also due to those friends whose aid we sought, regarding some matters connected with a journey through the western part of Iran.

MAY 5th 1938.  
15 CLIVE ROW  
CALCUTTA.

M. D.  
J. G. D.



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OMEN OF  
THE FALLING STARS

\* \* \* many a Night matched with day and  
Day with night, hold on their Circling  
course, and shall show thee all these  
Things \* \* \* clear at last.

“The Electra” — Sophocles —

*E. D. A. Morshead's translation.*

# OMEN OF THE FALLING STARS

## CHAPTER I.

A suburb of Isfahan — Founded under strange circumstances — Sketch of its early days — My birth and home.

The story which I narrate in these pages begins from the year 1916 at which time I was a girl of just nine summers.

I was journeying from Isfahan to India with my parents and two little brothers, through the western part of Iran. Up to Mohammerah the journey occupied about six weeks and was crowded with unusual experiences and although I was at that time only a little girl, all the incidents that occurred are today as vivid and fresh in my mind as though they had happened but yesterday. I was born in New Julfa, a suburb of the city of Ispahan, situated about three miles away from the latter.

Ispahan was in the past a great city, famed for its wonderful palaces and mosques, imposing bridges, beautiful gardens and great bazaars, but its glory has now departed. I shall refer later to this city, as also to the town I was born in and sketch briefly their past and present and shall also endeavour to give a picture of some of the places and objects of interest which lay along our path, as we travelled through this enchanting land.

The house we lived in was situated in the heart of the town, a comfortable little place with a small garden attached ; some flowering plants brightened it while a vegetable patch lay adjacent, both of which my father always tended.

We were a family of five, my parents, two little brothers and myself ; two other brothers older than myself were in India and had completed their studies in college. I had also a sister who was married and lived near by ; altogether our family consisted of eight members. My father was old and feeble ; his eyesight having become affected he could see just enough to grope his way about ; simple and kindly in disposition he was loved by all. My mother was in some respects the very opposite of my father ; full of energy and strict in bringing up her children, everything in the house went smoothly with the regularity of a clock, but beneath all her outward sternness lay the softest of hearts, for she was a friend to many in distress and looked after our well-being with ceaseless care and love. Under her guidance I soon learnt to knit and sew and in addition was taught other useful household duties. My two elder brothers had left for India when I was still in the cradle and when I had reached my ninth year, were still away. Two younger brothers, one six years old and the other five, were my playmates ; they attended a school a few hundred yards away from our home. As for me, I was put into a French convent not very far away from our place.

I feel it necessary now to give a little sketch of this

strange little town in which we lived, together with a short account of how it came into existence ; it is a page of romance in the history of little Christian communities, hidden away in the heart of a foreign country. The town of New Julfa which is inhabited by Armenians and a small European colony, numbering altogether about three thousand souls, has a very interesting past.

How did they come to make this spot their home, so far away from their homeland in Armenia ? They have built some beautiful edifices, laid out pleasant gardens, established convents and schools and erected several churches in this the land of their adoption. We must go back to a little over three centuries to trace its beginnings.

In about 1604 Persia and Turkey being at war, their armies overran Turkish Armenia and Georgia. Observing how industrious and skilled in crafts the Armenian inhabitants of the province of Azerbaijan were, Shah Abbas the King of Persia resolved to bring away to his country several thousand Armenian and Georgian families. Many had to leave their homes and thousands perished on the way, a remnant only succeeding to reach Iran. He settled the former in the outskirts of Isfahan and the rest were sent to various cities and districts of Iran. South of Isfahan and separated by the river Zenderud stretched a barren plain, where many were settled, receiving from the monarch every assistance to found their new homes and where they were allowed the free exercise of their Christian faith. This spot they

called New Julfa to remind them in their exile of Julfa on the Araxes and to which they were never to return.

For a time it was a hard and bitter struggle but with the passing of years the exiles became more reconciled to their lot ; the town grew and the more prosperous among the inhabitants laid out numerous gardens, ornamented with the elegant cypress, poplar and willow and in which grew the rose, jasmine, violet and the fragrant narcissus. In the orchards they cultivated the vine, peach, apricot, apple, red and white cherry, the melon and the pomegranate.

Throughout the day in their new homes, matrons and demure maids busied themselves with household duties and in the convents and hamlets, spun wool and wove carpets and rugs, often of beautiful designs. On Sundays and feast days the churches were filled with devout parishioners and many a maiden, garbed in her graceful national attire, whose soft features and alluring eyes peeped from beneath her veil, wended her way towards some particular parish church. The farms prospered and trade with the capital city and other towns and cities flourished, bringing abundance and prosperity to the exiles.

But a change was to take place later, for days of sorrow were in store for the colonists. Iran was invaded by a neighbouring foe and the country suffered all the horrors of a devastating war. The Mussalman inhabitants of Isfahan underwent untold sufferings, thousands perishing by the sword ; wondrous palaces and villas were set ablaze and the

once proud imperial city fell from the eminence it had attained, as one of the renowned cities of the world. New Julfa, as was inevitable, suffered too, though in a lesser degree—thousands left their homes, abandoning their farms, vineyards and gardens, to emigrate to foreign lands and there to begin life afresh.

These emigrations took place over a century and a half ago and the population of New Julfa which at one time exceeded 30,000 souls, dwindled down to about a tenth of that number, but those who remained behind, still tended their farms and the industry of the townspeople was never impaired. Life is much the same there today as it was in the past; such among the gardens as survived the devastating blight, still delight you as you enter them; the same sweet-smelling flowers and delicious fruits greet you; the schools, convents and churches are not deserted; the song of birds charms the listener and sweet music is often heard in many a home, while warm friendships subsist between friends in this little town of New Julfa.

Amidst such surroundings I came into this world on the 11th of December, 1906 and was christened in the Church of St. Minas, receiving the name of Mary.

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## CHAPTER II.

More regarding New Julfa — The Cathedral, the dwelling houses with their gardens — Fourfooted and feathered friends — Summer.

To complete my picture, as also because I feel it would interest my readers, I give here a short account of the town of New Julfa, sketching briefly as well, the daily life of the people.

When the immigrants first settled down in their new surroundings, they set to erect temporary habitations for themselves and opened out streets and alleys throughout the settlement, lining them with water courses and bordered by rows of poplars and willows. A church was built called the "Church of the Saviour of All"; later these temporary structures were pulled down and in their place were erected dwelling houses, schools and churches of brick and stone.

The "Cathedral of the Saviour of All" was then constructed taking the place of the older building which had been destroyed by fire. It is an imposing edifice, of ancient Armenian architecture, akin to the Byzantine and is the seat of a bishopric. The walls are decorated with paintings in oil, executed more than three centuries ago, depicting scriptural and allegorical scenes; the floors are covered with Persian carpets which in some of the monasteries and churches in Iran, are often over three centuries old, of rare designs and almost irreplaceable; stained glass windows embellish the walls; a library in the presbytery contains among many, several rare volumes,

and in this building are located the apartments of the bishop and other incumbents of the church. A large garden containing some ornamental and flowering plants, is enclosed within the boundary walls.

The dwelling houses of the town are usually one storey high but contain a sufficient number of living rooms, a store room, the kitchen and outhouses, with a well in the yard which provides water for household use. Most houses have their fruit and flower gardens attached and in a suitable corner within the grounds is the vineyard. The rose, tulip, violet and jasmine are favourites in our gardens. The roses of Iran are famed the world over for their rich fragrance and the profusion with which they grow.

"The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem  
For that sweet odour which doth in it live"

( *Wm. Shakespeare* )

I must not omit to speak of the few domestic friends we have. In most homesteads reigns the Persian cat, that important looking and serious-visaged creature, with its large piercing eyes, long soft hair and bushy tail and which is found most of the time curled up in some corner, fast asleep. When she gives a litter of kittens it is indeed a great day for us little ones, for then we have something to busy ourselves about, for each one of us is sure to claim some particular one which seems the prettiest of the lot.

At sunrise, perched on the parapets of the houses are the thrushes which sit all in a line, one looking

exactly like the other, chattering the while till they feel it time to take to wing.

In winter stray little birds, robin-like, come for shelter and warmth from the biting cold. The winter in Iran is severe and a fire indoors is a necessity. We often make a snowman in the garden and pelt it with snowballs till it falls to pieces. The water in the courses lining the streets freezes, and on our way to school we pick up stones with which we crack the surface of the ice. When summer comes all is life and activity, for then the country folk are busy at work and everyone in town is astir; the grass in the fields and the leaves upon the trees are fresh and green, while the birds on the branches twitter and whistle the live long day.

It is then that the nightingale is heard in the countryside or in some secluded garden pouring forth its song to the enraptured ears of the listener.

For lo; the winter is past, the rain is over  
and gone; the flowers appear on the earth;  
the time of the singing of birds is come and  
the voice of the turtle is heard in the land.

( *The Song of Solomon* i i, 11-12 )

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### CHAPTER III.

Convents, schools, public gardens—Music, and  
dance—Maidens and youths—Home—life.

There are two convents in the town, one managed by a French order of nuns, which in addition to teaching the ordinary school subjects, gives instruction in needle, fancy work and domestic economy ; pupils are also taught to weave carpets and rugs which are often of beautiful designs and in this convent I was placed under the care of the patient nuns. A chapel is attached to the building and a garden containing a number of flowering plants and fruit trees extends for some distance from it.

The other, the Armenian convent, teaches the same subjects as the former, except that the language used in imparting instruction is Armenian instead of French ; later I became a pupil in this convent where I passed, as I did in the other, many happy days. A chapel stood within the grounds and a small garden lay near, in which grew the rose, the lily and the violet. Some graceful cypresses adorned the grounds, while a solitary walnut tree grew a short distance away from the school building, which when laden with fruit, always received our attention. Two other gardens belonging to the convent were also enclosed within the boundary walls, in one of which grew the vine and in the other a number of mulberry, apple, cherry, and peach trees.

There is a large school for boys in New Julfa in which all subjects are taught by able teachers ; in addition to the Armenian language and literature, English, French and Persian are also taught. Some institutions for teaching various handicrafts also exist.

Music, vocal and instrumental, is much cultivated by the Armenian people of this country, the violin and flute being very popular ; songs touching and sweet are sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments.

The gardens of Iran are a delight to visit and are favourite resorts of holiday seekers. Ornamental and fruit-bearing trees with luxuriant flower beds, abound, for here may be seen the graceful form of the cypress, the stately poplar, the walnut tree and occasionally that "glory of Iran" the "chenar" or plane tree. The tulip, jasmine and narcissus delight the eye, while all around, the red white and yellow roses, perfume the air. Beneath the poplars or the leafy branches of a "chenar" young and old get together to drink tea or coffee brewed from the "samovar" and meanwhile a song from the lips of a maiden or the deep sonorous notes of a male voice, accompanied by some stringed instrument, arrest the attention of the company. Some of the older men possess rich voices and sing with much feeling, songs tender and passionate, songs patriotic, or those exquisite laments beloved of our wandering minstrels ; often we coax them to sing and they seem to know exactly what to choose.

Let me give below a specimen of one of those

touching ballads which our minstrels, who wander throughout Armenia, sing ; these troubadours compose their own songs, receiving inspiration from the wild rugged mountains, the enchanting valleys and streams or from the ruined monuments of the past of which a great number are to be found scattered throughout their native land.

The trouvère, like a wingless bird,  
Is here to-day and gone tomorrow ;  
A rolling wheel, for ever stirred.  
He's here to-day and gone tomorrow.

Whether by thirst or hunger tried,  
Or if success his fortunes follow,  
He still must wander far and wide—  
Be here today and gone tomorrow.

A glow-worm in the evening shade,  
From whom all men may tidings borrow  
A summer cloud, to float and fade,  
Is here today and gone tomorrow.

Like thunderbolts on vale and town,  
His tidings oft turn hope to sorrow,  
As thus he wanders up and down—  
Is here today and gone tomorrow.

\* Dijvani, like a honey-bee,  
A roving way must always follow ;  
Until he dies, you'll ever see  
Him here today and gone tomorrow.

( *M. Tchovanian.* )

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\* A renowned minstrel of Armenia.

Or what would be more appropriate than the following lines which that minstrel of the North has so feelingly sung ?

Such is the fate of simple Bard,  
On life's rough ocean luckless starr'd !  
Unskilful he to note the card of prudent lore  
The billows rage, and gales blow hard,  
and whelm him o'er !

*(Robert Burns).*

Now comes the dance in which youths and maidens join to the accompaniment of stringed instruments ; music and dancing are common accomplishments of the younger folk, who go through all the intricate mazes of the country dances with vivacity and charm and which are as captivating as those of Southern Europe. And why should they not be so ? For behind us, over 24 centuries ago when most of the peoples of Europe were just emerging from a state of primitiveness, a high civilisation and culture existed amongst us, which have come down unbroken through the ages, to the present day. The sun is now setting and we must return to our homes, but we know that soon again we shall visit this garden to pass another happy day amidst its flowers and inviting green lawns.

I shall now speak of our youths and maidens. Often our young men leave their homes to seek their fortune in distant lands and as they possess energy and perseverance, are almost always successful, often attaining to positions of eminence in all departments of human activity.

The beauty and grace of our girls is acknowledged by all, for Nature has endowed them with perfect health, which is reflected by the roses on their cheeks; they possess expressive eyes fringed with long lashes, while their rich tresses, golden, brown or black, fall in natural waves often nearly reaching down to their feet; there are beautiful blondes as also attractive brunettes, but above all is their quiet charm, their devotion to duty and love of home. Added to these qualities is the knowledge they possess, almost without exception, and which is imparted to them from their childhood days, of various household duties, such as cooking, the making of butter and cheese, sewing, knitting, fancy work and embroidery and in some cases the weaving of rugs and carpets.

Such then is the life we have in Isfahan, a life of simple charm, little cares, warm and lasting friendships, flowers, fruits and rose gardens, while always with us are the singing birds, the fierce-looking though affectionate Persian cat, and the beautiful horses and valuable blood mules and asses; in the countryside however lurk the cruel wolves, the big bears that descend from the hills and mountains and the prowling hyaenas, to which I shall refer later in this story.

A great change however has come over the city of Isfahan and its suburban town; streets have been widened and improved; shops now wear a brighter aspect and are stocked with goods of European manufacture; life has become more westernised; cinemas and cafes have sprung up where none existed before; tennis and other outdoor sports have their eager



votaries, while women unveiled, and garbed in the latest European fashions flit past in automobiles. In the country however, the old order still prevails and may it never pass away altogether, else much of the simplicity and charm of this historic land would be irretrievably lost.

Having sketched this picture, I shall begin now to narrate the story of my life.

---

## CHAPTER IV.

Rambles and escapades—A feast—Fruits of the orchard—Some experiences—Two Persian cats—A narrow escape—My school days.

It had been a long busy day, for mother had set us little ones some tasks to do during her absence from town.

My two little brothers Martin and Chris were left in my charge and I was to see that no harm came to them, for were there not those big and savage dogs that wandered in the street? And was not the well in the garden deep and the home of hobgoblins? The little boys tried after a fashion to go through their tasks but their childish pranks gave me more work to do than ever. It was now sunset. Father and mother should have been back by now! What could have happened to them? We were anxious, uneasy. As it grew darker we felt more and more afraid. "It is so dark" we remarked to one another. "Let us go to the gate and wait for father and mother. We shall then be able to see them coming along the road," I suggested. "Yes, let us go there," repeated the elder boy though his voice trembled as he spoke. We stood near the gate, a little huddled group and in spite of brave words, tears rolled down our cheeks. "Don't cry", we kept telling one another. Hark! the sound of footsteps on the highroad! But no, it was not our parents coming along; how disappointed we felt! It was a group of friends passing along, who guessing our fears, stopped

to inquire. "What is the matter with you little ones?" they questioned us. "Our parents have not yet returned" I replied, with a troubled look on my face, "we are alone, and are afraid—it is so dark." One of the party then stepped forward and said in a kindly way, "Well children, we will stay with you till your parents return." We had not long to wait for in a little while our hearts were gladdened to find them back home again. Then playful as lambs we frisked and romped about till supper time and before going to bed, said our prayers and soon were fast asleep.

Our parents on the morrow had to go out again to that distant place and I was left at home with my little brothers. While playing in the store room, a whiff of the sweet scent of quinces and apples penetrated our nostrils; stopping in the midst of our play, we joyously remarked to one another "Ah! ah! it's the quinces, they must be in the larder!" Climbing up to it, we spied the luscious fruit and with one voice exclaimed, "Ah yes, here they are!" A goodly number of sweet smelling quinces and rosy apples greeted our eyes. How could we resist them? The quince in Iran is soft and delicious and has a powerful and sweet scent which is never mistaken. After feasting on them, we romped about and at sunset made up our minds to go for a little ramble: soon we were ready and holding one another's hands, made for the road. We passed by the gates of some buildings and skirted the foot of the high walls of the French convent. The walnut and almond trees that grew in the grounds close to the roadside, threw their branches over the walls and we could see the

blossoms and fruit overhanging. Through the gate we spied the cherry and pomegranate trees growing a little distance away, the branches of the latter bending down with the weight of the fruit, while scattered here and there were rose bushes with lilies peeping from behind them.

Suddenly, startling sounds of snarling and screaming rent the air and behold ! two fluffy bundles of black and white kept tumbling over and scratching at each other before our eyes ; they proved to be two full grown Persian cats fighting savagely ; terrified we ran away as fast as our little legs could carry us.

Soon to our dismay we discovered we had strayed a good distance away from home, so stopping in the middle of the road, I said to my brothers, "Let us stop now, I don't know where we are ; we must return home". We stood quietly together, my finger in my mouth, puzzled how to find our way home. Just then a stranger who happened to be passing by, questioned us. "Little girl" he said, "what is the matter ?" I answered timidly, "We have been out for a walk and do not know our way home." He inquired again, "Are you Mr. Gregory's daughter ?" "Yes" I replied. "I thought so," he observed, "you for one, would never get lost ; the mole on your cheek will always find you ; come along" he added, "I shall see you children home, but don't in future wander so far away."

I shall now relate two other incidents of our childhood days ; they seem trivial but being faithful pictures of child-life in far away Isfahan, I trust I shall be excused recounting them.

My parents had again, a few days later, to leave us behind and on this day two little friends who live near by, joined us. An orchard belonging to the Armenian convent was separated from our house by a wall in which was a small low gate that gave access to the garden. We succeeded to slip into it and once there, it did not take us long to pluck a goodly number of apples and peaches and cram them into our pockets and hats ; we ate as many as we could and upon returning home, arranged the rest neatly on the table. We then collected together in the verandah where I had arranged my dolls, and continued our play. Presently a knock was heard at the gate and one of us called out "Who is that ?" Mother answered, "It is me, your mother." Taking the precaution of first concealing the fruits, we opened the gate. She however soon discovered the pranks we had been up to and inflicted upon us a well merited punishment.

The next incident took place some weeks later. Martin and Chris were playing in the garden and I was seated in my favourite corner near the stairs leading to the terrace, with my lesson book in my hand. I thought I would just go up to the gate and walk a little distance along the road ; I had barely stepped on to it, when four big black dogs rushed at me from the school compound, which was situated on the other side of the road. In terror I ran as fast as I could, but my foot caught a stone and I was sent sprawling on the ground ; immediately they made for me and fastening their teeth on to

my frock, kept pulling me away. Fearing that they were going to tear me to pieces, I wanted to scream but the fright I was in made me speechless. Just then a Persian wayfarer who happened to be passing by, hunted them away. I quickly got up and ran home, none the worse for my terrifying experience except my torn frock.

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## CHAPTER V.

Norashin, the Garden of Raisins—The nightingale—Two convents in Isfahan—A troop of Cossack horse.

There are two gardens in the Armenian quarter of Isfahan, one called Norashin situated within the town itself, a charming retreat, bordered on one side by the river Zenderud, with an avenue of "chenars" (plane trees) extending from the entrance of the garden to its furthest limits; some graceful poplars afford welcome shade, while a number of peach, quince and plum trees tempt the visitor with their delicious fruit. Bushes covered with roses captivate the eye and scattered here and there are trees bearing blossoms of blue, white and mauve. Under the shade of the "chenar" of whose praises the poets of Iran never tire, we gather together to pass a pleasant day.

The other garden is the Kishmish-i-Bagh or Garden of Raisins, a pleasant place, abounding in a greater variety of ornamental and fruit trees. Tall poplars and the lofty plane tree together with the elegant cypress and the willow, cast their shade over the pathways and green swards. Among the fruit trees one notices the apricot, peach, apple, mulberry, pear, quince, cherry and the walnut; there is the vine too, bearing grapes of several varieties. To this delightful place groups of holiday seekers come to while away the time, sitting in some favourite spot on Persian rugs under the

shade of the "chenars" or poplars and partaking of the good things spread before them, and listening the while to the music of stringed instruments.

At times the notes from the throat of a feathered songster, concealed amongst the branches, is heard, arresting the attention of all ; "Silence !" whispers one of the company—for it is the nightingale ! Conversation ceases, the music is hushed and the notes of that wondrous bird are listened to with rapt attention ; they are varied and speak of all the emotions of the human heart ; sometimes their entrancing harmonies fill one with inexplicable sadness, and at other times rouse in the heart of the listener, feelings of peace and goodwill towards our fellow men.

With apologies to the skylark, I quote the following lines which seem to me as appropriate to the one as they are to the other :—

What thou art we know not ;  
What is most like thee ?  
From rainbow clouds there flow not  
Drops so bright to see  
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.  
Teach us, sprite of bird,  
What sweet thoughts are thine :  
I have never heard  
Praise of love or wine  
That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.  
Waking or asleep  
Thou of death must deem  
Things more true and deep  
Than we mortals dream  
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream :  
(Percy Bysshe Shelley).



Then when the melody ceases some one breaks the silence and suggests the dance ; youths and maidens get together and music from stringed instruments keeps the pace. But the shades of evening now appear ; the birds are returning to their nests and swallows circle rapidly in the air ; it is time for us to depart to our homes.

I have previously alluded to a convent conducted by a French order of nuns, in which I was placed as a day pupil when I was seven years old. In addition to the three elementary subjects, reading, writing and arithmetic, French was also taught in that school, in which subject I was particularly good and always topped my class. Besides the class rooms, the building contained the refectory and the quarters for the sisters and lay teachers. An orchard containing fruits of various kinds and a flower garden in which roses and lilies abounded, lay within the grounds.

Frequently in the afternoons one of the sisters would take us to the fruit garden for recreation, where we would ramble or sit under the branches, she meanwhile reading out to us stories from the Bible or tales from other books. I cannot forget the following incident of my schooldays and will therefore once again beg of my readers to bear with me a little before I come to speak of my life's story.

A lucky bag competition was once got up and upon my drawing out a particular number from the bag, a happy smile lit up the teacher's face ; she then handed me a pretty rosary of dark blue beads, with a little

silver cross attached and putting it round my neck, lifted me in her arms and kissed me, telling me that I had won it. I was delighted at my good fortune, for the rich colour of the beads and the bright silver cross quite took my fancy. Some months later I was taken out of this convent and placed in a day-school situated opposite our place; in this institution the elementary classes received instruction in the Armenian language, while in the higher forms, English was taught in addition to Armenian. It was a large building, two storeys high, with a garden and a playground behind. My parents later, for reasons of convenience, placed me in another convent which also stood opposite our place. It was conducted by an order of Armenian nuns assisted by lay teachers, and received boarders, who were taught the following subjects only, domestic economy, fancy work, lace making and carpet weaving. Every morning after tea and a short study, we trooped along in charge of one of the teachers to the day school for our regular lessons, after which we returned in the evening to the convent. At sunset we attended chapel and then followed supper and after a short recreation, marched to the dormitory. It was also a two-storeyed building; on the basement floor were the refectory and four rooms for the sisters and teachers and in the upper storey were three dormitories and one large room in which classes were held for fancy work. Two verandahs adjoined the large room, one of which overlooked the Church of St. John. Near the main building was a large outhouse in which we received lessons in carpet weaving; a kitchen adjoined

it, where we were taught cooking and household duties. A pretty chapel stood near the flower garden and in the latter grew a few tall cypresses and a walnut tree as also some bushes laden with white, red and yellow roses.

As a child I was quiet and shy and would prefer to sit in some retired spot either knitting, crocheting or reading my lesson book. Every morning I was the first in the dormitory to rise, not that I was a model of discipline, but because I had an object in view, for I would go promptly up to the window to watch the walnuts dropping from the tree. Directly the cracking sound of the nuts, as they struck the ground, fell upon my ear, I would quickly run down the stairs and collect as many as I could. Often during recreation hours, I would sit and listen to the sweet notes of the thrushes as they sat perched on the ledges of the building; or I would stand near the window and watch a troop of horsemen at the foot of Sophie hill going through their military exercises and appearing in the far distance like little toy soldiers. It was a body of Russian Cossacks of whose presence in this country I shall speak presently.

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## CHAPTER VI.

Disturbed state of the country—Armed Russians and  
Germans—The mountain Lurs—Days of anxiety—  
In the nick of time—Officers of the Fatherland.

I remember well those days when the Great War was raging in Europe, for Iran too was in a disturbed state and some armed Germans had appeared in Isfahan.

The Lurs who inhabit the mountainous regions of Central and Western Iran, had got out of hand. Bands of marauders led by their chieftains, were approaching our town with the object of pillaging the homes of the Armenians. Our elders got our young men in readiness in order to guard our homes; meanwhile the Russians from their base in northern Persia, rushed a contingent of Cossack horse, which, arriving in the very nick of time, drove the Lurs back to the mountains. Wild and lawless, the latter are given to much violence and robbery, attacking caravans and solitary travellers who may happen to be passing through the hills and valleys they inhabit. They take everything away, making short work of such as attempt to offer resistance.

Just before the timely arrival of the troopers, I well remember the anxious time the sisters and teachers of the convent were going through; I would notice them speak in subdued tones and although I could not exactly understand what they said, I had

a vague notion that some fierce men were seeking to attack us. Prayers would be offered up twice or three times a day in the chapel, beseeching God to protect us. In the midst of our supplications glad tidings were brought that the Cossacks had arrived at our town. I now realised the imminent danger we were in, for had a delay of even an hour taken place, a sad tale indeed would have had to be recounted. The church bells rang out joyous peals and every homestead brought out its store of provisions to offer to our deliverers, we little ones joining in the festivities though not quite understanding the meaning of it all.

Once every day the troopers led by their officers, would do a route march through the town and at other times, small companies would be seen strolling along the streets ; we children would crowd round the gates of our houses and greet them with a "Good morning" in the Russian language, a few words of which we had picked up and which would so please them, that often a trooper would leave his comrades and come up to us and from his wallet take out slabs of chocolates and hand them over to us. Not to be in any way behind my companions, I one day ran up to the gate and standing at attention, saluted in military fashion a trooper who happened to be passing by, at the same time wishing him a "Good morning" in his own language. He promptly strode up and handed me a packet of chocolates.

It was this body of men that I would see from the window of the convent dormitory, going through

their military exercises every morning. On Sundays our good Cossack friends attended service at the Cathedral and it did one's heart good to notice their devout manner and to see them cross themselves at the conclusion of the service. They remained with us till such time as security had been established in Isfahan and upon departing received a hearty send-off from the towns' people.

I should like to speak of one other little matter connected with my schooldays in Isfahan. I have already referred to the Church of St. John that stood near the convent. From a window in the latter, I could see the altar within the church and day after day would watch, with my face resting on the sill, in the hopes that Our Lord or some angel would pass by. And why should they not? I thought. Was it not His house? But such a happy privilege was denied me, though childlike I believed that some day I would assuredly see those heavenly beings pass before me.

The armed Germans who had visited Isfahan, decided after a time to withdraw from the country and to depart to other theatres of that unfortunate war and before quitting the city, made a bonfire of their surplus stores and munitions. They too, had been kind to us children, giving us packets of sweets as they passed by.

I was told the following story which just goes to prove that these grim warriors of the Fatherland, had no enmity or quarrel with us children.

In the Great War, Germany had sent some troops

to Constantinople and whenever they marched through the city, crowds of little urchins would stand by, gazing at them. The German officers would step forward and hand over pretty little boxes of chocolates to them, regardless of their nationality, whether Greek, Armenian, Italian or Turkish, thereby gaining for themselves a great reputation among the little folk, for kindness and generosity.

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## CHAPTER VII.

Preparations for departure—Falling stars—We leave Iran—The road to the hills—Isfahan an imperial city—Its past—Fall of the city—Charm of the country-side—Shah Hussein—Afghans and Baluchees—The Shah deposed and put to death—Nadir Shah the Persian—Invades Hindustan—Sacks Delhi and butchers the inhabitants—Removes the Peacock throne—Isfahan revives

I have previously mentioned that my two elder brothers Minas and Lucas were in India, where, having completed their studies, they struck out for themselves and being intelligent and persevering got on well in life, Lucas earning later as a mining engineer, the equivalent of over £ 70/- a month. They wrote out to us to leave Iran and make our home with them, a suggestion which my parents welcomed. Although I was only a little girl then, a feeling of alarm took hold of me, as I had often heard my elders speak of the dangers of the journey, for even little children know that wild beasts roam in the mountains and robbers lurk behind rocks and in lonely places, but I kept those disturbing thoughts to myself.

One night shortly before leaving Isfahan, I had a dream. I dreamt that my little brothers and myself, were walking on the terrace of our house with our lesson books in our hands and ready to go to school. Gazing at the sky, I turned to them and remarked "I wonder whether I could touch it?" Looking round I spied a stick and fetching it, touched the sky



with it. Immediately the stars fell around us in a shower. My brothers upbraided me for what I had done and remarked "Mary, what have you done?"—to which I replied, "Don't speak, shut your eyes and go away." It was a vivid dream and seemed to fill me with fear. Previously, whenever I happened to have a dream, I was sure in the course of the day to tell it to my parents, but on this occasion I do not know what kept me back; I felt I could not tell them this dream of the "Falling Stars".

In the morning at tea time, I wished to relate it to her, but something again restrained me. I cannot explain the reason of my reluctance, except perhaps that I felt it was a sort of premonition of the dangers and sufferings that were in store for us.

Preparations were now being made for the journey; there were such a lot of things to do. To obtain our passports we had to visit the photographer and on the way to his place, I felt all the time sad at heart, whilst the rest of us were on the contrary, cheerful and lighthearted. On facing the camera, he noted my sad look. "Now smile", he said to me, but my face and ears were burning hot and I felt as though I were in a fever. Vague distressing thoughts flashed across my mind, as though I could foresee the sorrows and sufferings that were about to befall us.

I had an uncle, my mother's brother, who lived in our town; he, as also some friends and relatives, kept advising my parents not to undertake the journey just then; the roads were unsafe, they said, being

infested with robbers, besides there were other dangers and inconveniences to face, for in the long weary march there was the possibility of illness, with no medical aid at hand. It was not at all advisable too, they pleaded with my parents, to set out with children of such tender ages on such a hazardous journey. The muleteer, however, kept urging my father to undertake it, promising to complete the journey quickly and he gave such encouraging assurances that nothing could now alter my parents' resolve to travel with as little delay as possible. As for my mother, her love for her two absent sons in India was drawing her with an irresistible force towards them.

Up to the period that my story begins, travelling in western Iran could be performed only by means of caravans, but since the past few years a change has taken place, for motor services have been established along the main routes, making travelling both rapid and convenient.

At last the day dawned and the hour struck for us to leave our dear home. The sun had just risen and I heard the gruff voices of men in the yard. Then came the tinkling of those tiny bells that hang round the necks of the mules and asses. I also heard my mother's voice ; she was giving instructions to the muleteers about our baggage. Upon hearing their voices, my heart sank within me and I kept thinking to myself, "Are we then really leaving our home ? What is going to happen to us ? O, I wish I had been older, for then I could have coaxed my parents to change their minds, but as I am only a

child, they will just pay no heed to my entreaties." Sad at heart I kept going from room to room. I went to the yard and gave a last look at the little garden, the trees, the old well and at all the familiar objects around. I kept my eyes away from the muleteers, for a feeling of resentment came over me when I realised that they had come to take us away. As we were ready to depart, I ran up the stairs and stepped on to the roof of our house, Martin and Chris following. I stood in the middle of the terrace and once again repeated to myself "Goodbye dear home, we are going away at last!" I stood for a while reluctant to move when Martin's voice roused me, "Mary" he said, "come along, let us go". I followed him and soon we were all seated on the mules' and donkeys' backs. The gate was wide open to allow of the pack mules which bore our baggage, to pass through. It was a bright morning. One of the conductors called out "Boro!" (Persian Go!) which was the signal to start and immediately our mounts moved forward, with the bells tinkling as they filed along.

As we rode through an avenue of poplars which lined our path, I kept frequently turning round to gaze at my home, till a bend in the road hid it at last from view. Having proceeded some distance, we met a number of friends and relatives who accompanied us part of the way and when parting kissed us goodbye. My uncle however, who was one of the party, continued the journey with us and after a while he too, had to leave us; years have past and we have never met him again.

As the mounts kept pushing along, the distance between us and our dear home, lengthened every moment. Will we ever return to it again? When will we reach India, that vague and shadowy land about which they speak so much? These were the thoughts that kept constantly working in my mind. We were now passing by the orchards and farms that lie outside of the city; on every side, surrounded by high walls, were fruit and vegetable gardens owned by the wealthier Persian and Armenian inhabitants of Isfahan. Trees and shrubs grew in the open spaces, while numerous vineyards from which are produced the rich wines of the province of Isfahan, lay on both sides of the road.

Our cavalcade merrily marched along, occasionally skirting the banks of some little stream, while the bells around the necks of the mules and asses kept tinkling to the tramp of their hoofs. The air was sweet with the scent of roses and of the dew-laden leaves, while butterflies and other winged insects frequently flitted across our path. Soon these rural scenes were left behind and we began to enter into the open country, with the sun growing hotter and the road dustier as we pushed along.

My little brothers were in high spirits and I too felt the magic charm of the countryside, where shrubs bearing wild flowers and berries grew, with occasionally an orchard lying near our path. We were approaching the first halting stage of our journey and whilst passing through a stretch of high ground, there appeared faintly outlined in the distance, the quaint

towers, and the domes and minarets of the city of Isfahan.

At the close of the sixteenth century, Isfahan was chosen by Shah Abbas the Great of the Sefavi dynasty of Persia, as the most suitable site for the capital of his empire and which he ornamented with wondrous palaces, courts and gardens, stately mosques and colleges, numerous public baths and caravanserais and large covered bazars, which last were stocked with merchandise brought from various quarters of the globe. Five masonry bridges spanned the Zenderud, the river of Isfahan, one of which, the bridge of Ala Verdi Khan, was deemed at that period as unrivalled in the world.

I would ask my readers to peruse the narratives of travellers who have visited Isfahan. I shall however speak of a few of the outstanding features of this once celebrated city.

Isfahan at that period had a population of close upon a million souls ; twelve gates gave access to the city and it contained more than one hundred and fifty mosques, the public baths exceeded two hundred and fifty, whilst the royal palaces and garden retreats numbered over two hundred ; eighteen hundred caravanserais afforded shelter to travellers and itinerant merchants ; over twelve hundred villages surrounded the city, furnishing it with the produce of their farms.

The Char Bagh, which served as the main artery of the city, was lined with water courses and ornamented with fountains and avenues of poplars and sycamores.

The Maidan-i-Shah, which still exists, is a magnificent public square, the centre of the city's life. Surrounding it are the Royal Palace and courts, the Chief Mosque, the Great Bazar and numerous other buildings. Polo (Pers : Chugan) which was regularly played upon this square, was a favourite pastime with the nobility of Persia in Sefavi times. The Maidan is now much shorn of its former importance and magnificence.

The Aali Kapu or Sublime Port, which in itself is an imposing building, leads to the palaces, courts and gardens within, among which is the Chehel Situn (Hall of 40 Pillars) in which the monarch held court and where representatives of most of the states of Europe and of the East, sought audience of the king.

Another stately edifice was the Medresseh-i-Shah, the theological college of Isfahan, one of the most imposing buildings in the East, but which is now in ruins. Succeeding monarchs further embellished the city and during the reigns of Shah Suleiman and Shah Hussein, it contained garden palaces and courts so exquisite, that they brought to mind those enchanted abodes of the jinns and peris as recounted in the "Tales of the 1001 Nights".

The favourite retreat of Shah Hussein was the palace of Feradabad (Abode of Bliss), which he adorned with pavilions, terraces, miniature lakes and rosy bowers, a veritable dream mansion in which he frittered away his time, seeking only a life of ease, free from the cares of state.

Cup bearer ! fetch me that bowl of nectar !  
For in Paradise itself the enchanting  
banks of Rukhnabad  
Or the alluring rose-bowers of Musalla shall  
not be found.

( Ode—from the Diwan of Hafiz )

For a century and a half Isfahan stood pre-eminent among the cities of the world. The imperial court and the more prosperous citizens, secure and undisturbed for generations and given over to luxury, grew soft and enervated.

Far away in the east in 1722, clouds of dust were seen to arise from the arid plains of Seistan and Khorassan, raised by the hoofs of 20,000 horse. A horde of resolute horsemen was advancing across the plains, pillaging and slaughtering the unfortunate inhabitants in its path. Slowly but surely those clouds of dust advanced westwards in the direction of the imperial city. The grandees, the military commanders as also the vainglorious and pleasure-loving citizens, expressed their profound contempt for this small and what they considered doomed army of horsemen. The invaders which consisted of Afghan and Baluchi horsemen with 100 camel guns and led by Mahmud, chief of the Gilzais, attacked the royal troops of Shah Hussein on the fatal plain of Gulnabad, the scene of Persia's eternal shame. They charged again and again with the greatest impetuosity, the Baluchis especially distinguishing themselves for their reckless bravery; the forces of the Shah broke and fled and the battle ended in the complete rout of the flower of the Persian army. Large numbers were cut

down, for no quarter was given. The city was sacked ; then came the final scenes of woe and horror ; a general massacre followed, the streets ran blood and the river Zenderud was choked with corpses ; fire then raged in that unhappy city and famine followed in its wake ; some of the proud palaces, the bazars, baths and mansions of the rich, were given over to the flames, even the mosques and medressehs in some instances not being spared. The Shah lingered in his garden retreat of Feradabad, fondly hoping that the conquerors would spare his life ; he would willingly renounce his kingly powers, if they would only grant him the one boon he sought and that was to end his days in that dream palace in peace and repose ; but they turned a deaf ear to his entreaties and pitilessly slew him in that "Abode of Joy" he loved so well.

The worldly Hope that men set their Hearts upon  
Turns ashes—or it prospers ; and anon,  
Like snow upon the Desert's dusty Face  
Lighting a little hour or two—is gone"

*(Rubayat of Omar Kayyam, Verse XIII.)*

The Gilzais occupied the throne of the illustrious Sefavi monarchs, till a deliverer arose in 1727 in Nadir Guli Khan, an obscure chieftain of Iran, later known as the renowned Nadir Shah, a military genius of whom the Iranian ever speaks with affection and pride.

It was he, better known as Nadir Shah the Persian, who invaded Hindusthan in 1738 when the Mogul power in India was fast declining. After sacking Delhi in the succeeding year and ordering a dreadful massacre of its inhabitants, Nadir removed to his



capital in Persia immense treasures, the Peacock throne alone being valued by Tavernier at £ 6,000,000 sterling. The golden period of Isfahan's history had irretrievably passed with the destruction brought upon it by the Afghan conquest. No existing city in the world wears such an aspect of desolation, for what were once noble edifices are now in ruins, gardens that delighted the eye, are now overgrown with rank weeds and grasses, while decaying mounds of bricks meet the eye at every turn, mute evidences of the tribulations that had befallen the city.

It never however suffered complete destruction, for several of its palaces and gardens, most of the mosques and the famous bridges and bazars, escaped the ravages of that invasion and when in later years the Afghan usurpers were expelled along with their Baluchi allies from Iran and Nadir was supreme in the land, Isfahan rose again from the ashes into which it had sunk. These then were the selfsame cupolas, minarets and towers that loomed in the distance, as our humble caravan kept hastening on its journey southwards.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

The villages around — Fields, meadows, rural scenes —  
Home-sick — End of the second day's journey.

We continued to march over the narrow and uneven path, at times skirting the walls of isolated gardens; occasionally the low branch of a tree stretched across the road, but a timely warning from the conductors prevented any untoward accident. Shrubs that bore tempting berries would catch our eye—"Let us pluck some", we would tell one another, but mother's warning voice always checked us. "Don't touch them, they are poisonous" she would tell us. The village dogs, as they spied us, barked and snarled in rage—"Bero! phadr sookhtie!" (Get away! you sons of a burnt father!) the muleteer would growl and then cut at them with his whip.

It was now late in the afternoon and the jolting we had been subjected to over the uneven road, had wearied us. A clump of trees in the fields across, afforded us welcome shade, while the fresh air of the open country sharpened our appetites; spreading our carpets we reclined on them and refreshed ourselves with tea from the "samovar". Another march of a few hours lay before us, after which we entered a little hamlet with the setting of the sun. Our day's journey having thus come to a close, the muleteers led us to a small caravan-serai in which we passed the night in comfort. Our baggage was placed in the larger room, the walls of

which were rather unsightly, the plaster having fallen in places, and when the floor had been swept clean by the servant, the carpets were spread. Finding ourselves covered with dust we told the attendant to fetch water from the well and after a refreshing wash, rested ourselves on the rugs till supper time.

The experiences of the day though trying, had been novel, especially the ride on the asses' backs, so forgetting our grief at having left our home, my brothers and myself stretched ourselves on the rugs and were soon fast asleep. The mules and asses had meantime been given their feed of barley with wisps of straw to nibble at, and then after a long refreshing sleep, morning broke. Martin, Chris and myself thought we would go for a little ramble to a field across the road, in which was a pond and on whose surface floated pretty water lilies. Some women were having a dip in the pool, others were cleaning their cooking pots, whilst the rest were washing their clothes and singing as they worked. "What a nice pond! I remarked to my brothers, "let us bring away those lilies". We threw pebbles into it and watched the ripples they made. Meanwhile at the serai, water was brought from the well and after a bath, we sat to our morning meal and soon were ready again for the road.

The ruts and hollows caused us to fall off the backs of the mounts, upon which the muleteer advised us to sit far back, for, if the creatures stumbled, he said, there would be less likelihood of our being pitched over into the road.

Before completing the journey to the first resting

stage, its novelty had entirely dispelled the sadness which had been oppressing me ; we were not far away too, I thought, from Isfahan and could if we wished, have easily retraced our steps to the city ; but now everything seemed to be in grim earnest, for each step forward only meant that we were so much further away from home. Realising this, a feeling of despondency once again came over me and I kept constantly thinking of our happy little home, to which perhaps I was never to return.

In the fields the peasants could be seen busy at work, or we would come across groups of country folk trudging along the road, carrying the produce of their farms to the city for disposal. The cool lanes that lay in the outskirts of Isfahan, had now been left far behind and the road before us was straight and cheerless. We kept up steadily the wearisome march, halting only occasionally beneath the shady branches of a tree, in order to give ourselves and the animals a rest. Our conductors when on the march, would at times keep pace beside us while on other occasions they rode in advance, keeping up a conversation with one another in a strange tongue ; in almost all cases these people belong to one of the several Bakhtiari tribes which inhabit the western regions of Iran. They possess great enduring powers and live on the simplest fare.

At sunset we spied a village in which we were to pass the night, and soon after, the barking of dogs announced our arrival at this the second stage of our journey. Our mounts without being guided, made straight for the caravanserai, where we dismounted and

relieved the creatures of their burdens. A room was made ready and in which we reposed in comfort. One of the donkeys whose hunger apparently had not been quite satisfied, after the weary march he had performed, approached us from the yard and thrusting his head through the open door with his long ears cocked, stared at us with a look of the greatest innocence. We gave him some bread from our store—he continued however to wait patiently for more—whereupon we bade him go away, which he understood, for he turned and quietly walked away to rejoin his companions.

Supper time having arrived, we partook of an enjoyable meal and after a little while lay down to sleep. Directly our heads touched the pillows, sound sleep came to us. When the cock crew at early dawn, the muleteers advised my parents to get ready for the day's march, so that as much of the journey as possible could be performed in the cool of the morning. Tea was accordingly quickly made, after which we bestrode our mounts and quitted the village before sunrise.

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## CHAPTER IX.

Christian colonists—The shepherd dog—The village headman—The clergyman and his family—A village church—Village youths—Steep mountain roads—A chief and his family—Hospitality—Pastoral scenes.

At this early hour a quiet and calm hung everywhere ; the village dogs were asleep and the birds still nestled among the branches and the only sounds that disturbed the stillness of the air, were the clattering of the hoofs and the tinkling of the bells of our mounts. Pushing along over the stony road, it was all we children could do to keep to our saddles and when the march had continued for some time, the sun appeared over the horizon. The fields around were sparsely dotted with trees, but wild shrubs grew thick everywhere ; there were no streams to cross, nor did any ponds or green meadows appear along our path ; there was hardly a feature in the landscape to cheer one, except that great ball of fire, the sun, slowly ascending the heavens. The march having continued for some time in silence, the stillness around was suddenly broken by one of our men announcing that we were approaching some villages inhabited exclusively by Armenian farmers. When within a stone's throw of their homesteads, the muleteer bawled out to the villagers that we wished to pass and for them to chain up the big dogs, which are kept to guard the villages at night and to protect the sheep in the fields and pens.

The Persian shepherd dog is a big and powerful creature, about the size of a collie, intelligent and faithful to the last degree, a couple being more than a match for any stray bear or hyæna that may venture to approach the village. After receiving assurances that they had been securely chained, we entered the village, being welcomed by the headman who invited us to his cottage, where we found his wife, two daughters and a son. He and his stalwart son, were in the very pink of health and strength ; the daughters were pretty with the bloom of roses on their cheeks, rich brown hair and eyes fringed with long lashes. He invited us to share with him his frugal fare, but which actually proved to be a feast, for it consisted of a liberal quantity of freshly baked bread, cheese, sour milk and honey, followed by fruit from his orchard. After the usual commonplace conversation had taken place, he conducted us at our request to the village church ; it was a dear little place built of brick and stone, the floor covered with carpets, whilst the walls and altar were devoid of any ornamentation whatsoever. Adjoining were the pastor's quarters, where we made the acquaintance of the reverend gentleman and his family, which consisted of his wife, two sons and two daughters ; the boys were at their lessons and the girls spinning wool, while their mother was busy over household duties. After availing ourselves of their hospitality we parted company, the kind pastor offering us his blessings and good wishes for a safe and happy journey. The girls

put me many questions regarding the convent I attended in New Julfa and when about to depart for our journey, they and their mother kissed us little ones goodbye.

In this part of the country are scattered many Armenian villages, walled round as a protection against wolves and bears or the visits of robbers who live in the hills beyond. At nightfall the village youths armed with slings, keep guard by relays and watch from the housetops for any approaching bear that may seek to enter the village in search of the newly harvested grain or ripe fruit of the orchards, or, to drive away the wolves and hyænas that come to attack the sheep and cattle and even to carry off little children; crouching beside their masters, the fierce yet faithful sheep-dogs keep guard, ready to tear to pieces any intruder that should dare to approach the village walls. Very effective weapons indeed are these slings, with the smooth round stones, exact replicas of those which the Roman and Greek slingers of old, used in battle and with which the youthful David slew the giant Goliath, the champion of the Philistines.

When Shah Abbas the king, parcelled out among the Armenian colonists the land on which New Julfa stands, a barren plain near the Bakhtiari hills had likewise been set apart for the accommodation of the streams of immigrants from Armenia. Such then is the origin of the Armenian villages situated in the heart of Iran and where the light of Christianity, unknown and neglected by the Christian peoples of



other lands, has remained unextinguished for centuries. Leading as they do a pastoral life, there is much of interest and charm in the manners and customs of these exiles to recount, but as space will not permit me to touch upon these subjects, it is sufficient for me to say, that by their industry and grit they have converted this once inhospitable region, into a tract in which farms, orchards and rich fields of corn, barley and other cereals, abound.

The muleteers now appeared with the mounts all saddled up and with our baggage securely bound across the backs of the pack mules. Bidding our hosts once again goodbye, we departed amidst their valedictions and took to the road again. A steady march was now kept up through uninteresting country, for on either side of the road stretched broad fields, covered only with wild bushes and long grasses and with no farms or homesteads lying along our path. As we kept advancing over the monotonous road, the fields around appeared to be barren and uncultivated. The path had become more uneven than before and the rough stones on its surface made it all the more difficult for our patient animals to keep up an even pace, compelling the conductors to dismount and walk beside them; often the beasts would stumble, but as quickly recover themselves. The road now rose and fell, with rocks protruding from its surface and the muleteers informed us that we would soon be ascending a range of hills.

To our right lay a cluster of villages, all of which our conductor said, were inhabited by Persian country folk and he inquired whether we would like to visit one

of them. Agreeing to his suggestion, he conducted us to a small building in which we found our host, the chief of the village, a venerable looking man and whom we found seated in the open space in front of the building. He rose as we approached and upon being informed that we were travellers journeying from Isfahan to India, cordially welcomed us and after a brief conversation, asked my parents whether they would like to be introduced to his family. Stepping into an adjoining room, we found his daughters and a daughter-in-law weaving a rug; the Khanum (Pers: spouse) was busy with her household duties, conversing however with us, as she bustled about, in Persian. Half the length of the rug had been completed and as we stood watching them at work, we could notice their healthy complexions and agreeable features. Our presence was an event in their lives and soon getting over their awkwardness, they answered my mother's questions readily. Whilst still weaving, they enlivened the tediousness of their task by singing a little ditty in the Persian tongue.

Our host having now pressed us to partake of some refreshments, a tray was brought on which were placed fresh bread, butter and cheese; on another tray were arranged small dishes containing cream, honey and sweets; we partook of some and after a little conversation bade our host farewell. Some distance away on the road was another hamlet, out of which emerged a number of dogs, which kept barking and viciously rushing up to us and even attempting to bite our feet. The muleteer in angry tones remonstrated with the

villagers in these forceful words :—"K̄har-i-akhmakh, sagid begir"! ( You stupid donkeys, tie up your dogs ! ), then lashing out with his whip, drove the dogs away. After tramping along for some length of time, we noticed a flock of sheep and goats with the shepherds leading and the sheep dogs around them, wending their way homewards across the pastures, the shepherds meanwhile piping their wild and sweet music. At future stages of our journey droves of mules, asses, horses and buffaloes, would pass by on their return from the grazing fields.

What seemed of particular charm, was the sight of the shepherd leading his sheep and bearing in his arms the helpless lambs, while the long crook and sling, marked him as the protector of the flock.

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd ;  
He shall gather the lambs with His arms and  
carry them in His bosom.

*(Isaiah)*

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## CHAPTER X.

Trekking—A halt and a rest—Mountains, rocks and ravines—  
A wearisome march—In a caravanserai—My uncle meets us.

The sun was now setting, and its rays gilded the landscape and lengthened the shadows of the trees and shrubs that grew by the wayside. Overhead, birds flew across to roost among the branches ; the husbandman who had gathered together his implements of labour, was slowly wending his way homeward ; the sheep were returning to their folds and the patient watch of the shepherd, was coming to a close. A little more and our tired mounts too, would earn their needed rest.

The drivers now kept urging them forward, with the object of reaching the next stage before darkness set in ; instinctively the creatures, which understood, hastened their paces and in a little while we entered the village which was to be our bivouac for the night. On being conducted to a small building, we selected a room in which our belongings were deposited and where we rested our tired limbs upon the rugs that had been spread. The rough and stony road had so wearied the mounts, that they stood in the yard motionless and with their heads drooping low.

Fresh bread, warm from the oven, cheese and honey, were procured in the village and after partaking of our supper, we stretched ourselves upon the rugs, sleeping soundly till dawn. I may remark that in

Iran, bread, cheese, butter and other eatables, whether obtained in the cities or villages, are always excellent, being prepared with care and cleanliness, for the Iranians are fastidious over the quality of the food they eat. On waking, we enquired of the muleteer as to when we should be ready for the march, to which he replied that it was impossible to continue the journey that day, since the asses needed rest, and further that he had some urgent business of his own to attend to; he therefore requested us to prolong our stay at this village. Accordingly, the caravan tarried for two days in this hamlet, we children passing the time with our school books, or going out for rambles in the country-side with our parents. Soon the morning on which the journey had to be resumed, dawned. The mules and asses had recovered from their fatigue, looking quite spritely and with their heads well up. After paying up the keeper of the caravanserai his dues, we mounted in front of our lodgings and soon left this quiet village far behind. The journey now lay over a track rougher and steeper than any we had previously ridden over. On several occasions the asses stumbled, sending us sprawling on the ground, and causing our hands and knees to receive bruises from the rough surface of the road, whereupon the muleteers would again warn us to sit far back and avoid leaning over the shoulders of the animals. We kept struggling over a narrow path, flanked on one side by steep banks and on the other by precipices that dropped thousands of feet into the yawning chasms below. What if our beasts should stumble? I thought. Would we not be

hurled into those awful depths? Sitting far back, I clutched at the pommel of my saddle, pleading with my parents and brothers to do the same, while the road rose and fell with big jagged rocks appearing everywhere. We were now ascending higher and higher and as I looked down over the edge of the narrow path, a feeling of dread seized me as I saw the yawning depths below.

“Why are we here?” I asked myself. “What has brought us to these wild regions?” I longed to return to my dear home in Isfahan, but there was to be no turning back from that relentless march.

Just before descending to the valley below, our conductors called a halt, and as I looked around I could see the lofty mountains towering above us. It seemed like a new world to me and I could hardly understand it. Why were those mountains so stern and forbidding? There, then, I thought, must be the homes of robbers and of ravenous beasts, about which we had so often heard from our infant days. I asked my brothers what they thought of it and they answered, “Yes, robbers and big bears live there!” Fear took hold of us and for some length of time, we hardly spoke a word to one another. What if we should by some chance get separated? That thought distressed me, so I moved up close to where my parents were, telling my brothers to do the same. Sorely troubled in mind, I longed to be away from those dread surroundings.

The animals picked at the grass that grew in small patches around and having regained breath, we again bestrode them and were ready for the downward

march. Though the path was narrow and rocky, the mules and donkeys picked their way wonderfully, for never once did they stumble, the instinct of self-preservation seeming to make them more surefooted than ever.

While descending to the foot of the hill, that feeling of fear which had seized my brothers and myself, vanished altogether and we were now as happy as larks, for were we not soon going to be back again to level ground and in the midst of human habitations?

When skirting the edges of precipices, I always took care not to look down and I would shut my eyes or turn my face away, telling my brothers to do the same. Down, down, we descended, winding in and out of the mountain sides, and at last reached the foot of the hill, near which was a little dell in which we camped. There was still another high mountain to climb and in our efforts to reach the top, we had to undergo the same trying experiences. For the first time now, I noticed an anxious look on my mother's face, and I observed too how silent she had become, when all along before this, she was so full of life and animation. Struggling up the steep road, we at length reached the crest of the hill, where we pulled up the mounts for a short rest before beginning again the descent. We caught a glimpse of a village nestling among the trees at the foot of the hill; that was to be our halting stage for the night.

After a weary tramp, we came to the end of that day's wanderings, the obedient creatures which we had

been riding, putting on a spurt and trotting animatedly over the last hundred yards of road before entering the hamlet that had been inviting us from the moment we first spied it. Dismounting before the caravanserai, a feeling of relief came over us when we found that we were back again to level ground, gladdened too by the sight of children around us, of goats, of dogs, of poultry, and of all the familiar objects that are to be seen in a village. Having arranged everything comfortably for us in the serai, the "Charvadars" led the beasts to the stables ranged outside of the building, where water and fodder were provided them. Then stretching ourselves on the carpet, we slept that night earlier than usual, regardless of the noise from the braying asses and the barking of the village dogs.

The sun was already high up in the heavens when we woke from sleep. We wished to go for a little ramble, but our parents prevented us venturing out of the serai, since the village was infested with dogs and the paths lonely and unsafe ; we therefore remained indoors, passing the time in play and in watching the mules and donkeys being groomed and fed. Meanwhile it was decided that we should rest throughout that day, and take our departure on the following morning.

Late that afternoon, while we were at tea, one of the muleteers came up and informed my parents that he could see in the distance a man mounted on a mule, approaching at some speed in the direction of our village. In a little while we were agreeably surprised to find that the individual was none other



than an uncle of ours, who had come all the way from a distant place, to meet us. He took my parents aside and in earnest tones kept conversing with them. I could not help but hear him reasoning and trying to persuade them not to continue the journey; it was so full of dangers, he kept reminding them, that it was not at all advisable to travel in the way they did; that they should return at once to Isfahan, and that at some future time, fresh plans could be arranged for the journey to India, promising that he would accompany us all the way down, since it was his intention as well, to visit that country. Having casually heard, he said, of our arrival at this village, he, with the object of dissuading us from our course, had engaged a speedy mule, and had ridden posthaste, so as to catch us up before we quitted the hamlet. At times, I thought he had succeeded to get my parents to alter their decision and return to Isfahan, but soon I realised that nothing would make them change their minds, for they seemed resolved at all costs to continue the journey.

Had they only turned back, dear readers, this story would never have been written, for we would not have undergone those trials and sufferings that had befallen us, and which form the theme of my life's story.

But the omen of the **Falling Stars** was impelling us forward, in order that its message should be fulfilled.

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## CHAPTER XI

Over steep and precipitous paths — The Bukhtiaris —  
Ardal — In a bewildering region — The hyaena —  
Our supply of water runs out — We come to a spring.

As the sun rose from behind the hills, we began to make preparations again for the march through the Bukhtiar country. My uncle's mule stood waiting for him in the yard and when he kissed us goodbye, I could see the thoughtful look on his face. Mounting the creature, he sped away, occasionally turning round in his saddle to wave us a goodbye, and when lost to view, we left the caravanserai, travelling in the opposite direction. It was the last we saw of him, for after a few years he died.

Our path now lay along the steep hillsides, the rocks on the surface of the road making it difficult for us to proceed quickly; often my mount would fall, bringing me down with it; stunned, I would rise, soothing the bruised surface of my skin, then stroking the creature's shoulder, I would coax him on to his feet, which, with a little effort he would do and I would then scramble on to his back again. "I wonder whether he is tired!" I would ask myself. Realising how difficult it was for me to keep to my saddle, I now discontinued riding the donkey and did the greater part of the journey on foot, leading the creature along by the reins, for I was then a sturdy little girl and never seemed to tire. Up hill and down dale we plodded

along, each day's journey hardly differing from that of the day before ; the same tramp, tramp, the same rest for a few short minutes beside some rock or beneath the shade of a tree, and then the same monotonous march again. We now found ourselves in the heart of the Bukhtiari country, peopled by tribes whose origins are obscured in the mists of antiquity. The Bukhtiaris are mainly a pastoral people, breeding horses, mules and asses, sheep, cattle and poultry ; the black tents in which they dwell, are dotted over the hillsides and valleys. The men are tall and robust, have bold black eyes, surmounted by heavy dark brows and with black beards and hair ; as horsemen they are excellent, being trained from childhood to the saddle and very proficient in the use of arms.

The women are comely, though of a rugged type of beauty ; they prepare in their homes excellent cheese, butter and curds and weave carpets and rugs, often of pretty designs. Some tribes live solely by plunder, attacking caravans and solitary travellers : we could see all around us the dark frowning mountains in which these people dwell.

I had often heard in the conversation of my elders, regarding the doings of some bandit chief, who, pouncing upon some defenceless traveller, robs him of everything he possesses. With these thoughts in our minds, we kept struggling along those steep roads and awful precipices, expecting every moment to be accosted by some lurking robber. The day's march was however, soon coming to a close, for our conductors pointed out to us a large village

which lay partly hidden in the valley below. Soon we reached Ardal, an important stage of the journey, from which two roads branch off, one northwards, and the other in a southerly direction. In the valleys and hill slopes around Ardal, the Bukhtiaris, who come down from the surrounding country, pitch their tents and pass the summer, grazing their flocks of sheep and cattle and their valuable studs of horses, mules and asses.

A panorama of lofty mountains stretched in the distance as far as the eye could reach, their crests being covered with eternal snow. Having passed the night in this village, the next morning saw us on the road again. Up to this place, I was able to grasp the meaning of most of the sights and incidents of our travel with some clearness, for their very strangeness seemed to fix themselves in my mind, but from now onwards, I felt as though I had been transported to some other world. All around were mountains, ravines, rocks and roaring cascades and occasionally when skirting the fringes of forest-clad hills, the angry waters filled us with alarm as they rushed headlong through the narrow gorges. Dense bushes and trees, on which grew wild flowers, surrounded us on every side ; insects at sunset emitted shrill ear-splitting sounds ; bird-life seemed absent, but upon the hillsides could be seen occasionally the wild deer browsing undisturbed.

Often when travelling through the Bukhtiari country, the skulking hyæna concealed in its lair, would mock us with its meaningless laugh. So humanlike was

it, that for a moment we took it to be some jovial care-free traveller on the road, but soon came to realise that it was after all only a stray laughing hyæna lurking among the bushes.

In this bewildering region, our caravan proceeded as wanderers on the face of the earth. I shall not be able to narrate all the incidents of our journey during those unforgettable days of hardships, except a few that made a deep impression on my mind, one of which was the frequent shortage of water. One day while tramping wearily over the dusty roads, I experienced a parched sensation in my throat and soon a feeling of faintness came over me. I tried to fight against the burning thirst, for, when passing by the trees and shrubs that grew along the road, I would gaze at them, fondly hoping that their moist green leaves and branches would help me to forget and so soothe that distressing feeling. Not a spring or water-course lay on our path and at last, unable to endure it any longer, I succeeded just to utter these words, "Mother, I am feeling faint!" She called out to the muleteer to quickly fetch some water, but unfortunately the supply had run out. One of the "charvadars" however, realising my plight, ran up to one of the pack mules and unloosening a leather water-bag which had been strapped to the baggage, hastened to my assistance. He managed to pour just a mouthful down my throat, which was sufficient to revive me and allay that burning thirst, my little brothers too receiving a mouthful each of that precious liquid. We turned to see where father was, so that he too might

receive some of it, but he had got separated from us while on the march.

The one thought uppermost in everyone's mind now, was water and nothing but water. How long would we be without it? Would that feeling of unquenchable thirst and faintness come over us again? With these thoughts in our minds we pursued our way, hardly uttering a word, but constantly glancing to the right and to the left, in the hopes of coming across some spring. Suddenly to our joy, the muleteers announced that they could see one a short distance away and upon our reaching it, we saw father bending low beside it, quenching his thirst. With one accord we called out "Ah, here is father!" We too, eagerly quaffed of that life-giving stream, while our impatient mounts were with difficulty kept back and when we quitted the spring, the thirsty creatures pushed their way up to it, and burying their noses into the tiny pool, drank their fill. The water-bags and earthen jars were replenished, and after a short rest, we took to the road again.

Then when the sun dipped behind the hills, a village came to view, where we sought shelter in a small building, our mounts too obtaining rest in the stables.

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## CHAPTER XII.

In the heart of the mountains—A change of plan—Night travelling—Moonlight among the mountains—Dangers of the journey—Nomad tribes—The Guebers or Fire-worshippers—Our three asses.

Most of us in our youthful days have read those stirring tales recounted of the white man, who, having left his home in the old country, crossed the broad Atlantic to settle down in the New World, there to contest with the red man the possession of the land.

On, on, he trekked westwards, across the limitless plains, braving the spears and the scalping knives of the Indian, while the coyote and the deadly rattlesnake ever lurked in his path. But the march never ceased, nor did he complain, buoyed up by the bright hopes of a happier future existence.

Were not our parents too, journeying to that distant and wonderful land of India, where were their two long separated sons, the hopes of their lives? Some day, and perhaps soon, our weary march would end too.

The morrow found us ready for our travels, and soon we were once again among the great mountains of Iran, the same steep heights to climb, the same winding paths, rocks, torrents, wild acorns and flowers, while among the branches, the feathered dwellers of the forest emitted their varied notes as our cavalcade moved steadily onward. The mountain sides were covered with vegetation and occasionally the giant

trees that towered above us, kept murmuring to the rocks and caverns the deep secrets of the forest.

Two voices are there ; one of the sea,  
One of the mountains—each a mighty voice.

(*Wm. Wordsworth*)

Persian porters were winding in and out of the mountain sides carrying large baskets of salt, or a group of travellers would pass by on their tramp to their distant homes. At the close of day when nearing a village, flocks of sheep and goats passed us on their return from the pastures.

Often in our travels when resting in some serai, the obliging muleteers would go and fetch fresh goat's or ass's milk from some homestead nearby. In the quiet of the evening, while we were resting in the serai, the muleteers presented themselves and expressed their desire that we should, from the next day forward, travel both by day and by night. Travelling by night, they said, was not so exhausting, as the coolness of the air after sunset, would, they explained, enable us to make much headway : the moonlight too, would help us to pick our way along.

These reasons seemed so sound, that my parents agreed to their suggestion. At nightfall we sat to a simple meal of freshly baked bread, meat, curds and cheese, followed by cool water from the well ; then saying our prayers, we lay down to sleep, but before I slumbered, I wondered when this long journey was going to end and I prayed to God earnestly, to make it a safe and happy one for us.



We slept peacefully throughout the night and when morning broke, the loud braying of the asses roused us from our slumbers. It did not take us long to get ready and before the sun had well risen, we left the village, entering into a broad field through which the road lay. Throughout that day we trekked leisurely, the muleteers occasionally bawling out a song, to enliven the monotony of the march.

Choosing some spot protected from the sun's rays, we spread our rugs and rested a while and then the march began again. The animals were not at any time urged forward, for there was the night journey too before them to perform. At sunset we camped beside a brook under the shade of some trees, where we partook of supper and after loitering for some hours in this pleasant little dell, were ready again for the night's wanderings. The moon had risen and the heavens were a mass of shining stars, and under that glorious canopy, our little cavalcade picked its way to the accompaniment of the tinkling bells.

"And that inverted Bowl we call the Sky

Whereunder, crawling, coopt, we live and die"

*(Rubaiyat of Omar Kayyam.)*

It was our first experience of travelling by night. The moon lit up the road and outlined the mountains around, and the stars above kept twinkling and twinkling, as our caravan threaded its way through the narrow and precipitous paths. When gazing at that lamp of night and the myriads of stars above, one knew and felt that these works of God were not inert and dead, but full of movement, harmony, and purpose.

Soon as the evening shades prevail  
 The moon takes up the wondrous tale,  
 And nightly to the listening earth  
 Repeats the story of her birth ;  
 While all the stars that round her burn,  
 And all the planets in their turn,  
 Confirm the tidings as they roll  
 And spread the truth from pole to pole  
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 For ever singing as they shine.  
 The hand that made us is Divine.

( *Joseph Addison* )

A feeling of awe came over me, as I beheld the grandeur of the heavens and of the mountains beyond. I wondered whether it was a reality or only a dream. I kept back my fears, not uttering a word to my parents. Then my thoughts went to those lurking robbers: would they swoop down upon us from their lairs? What if those evil men were to attack us? Would they carry us away and separate us? I glanced anxiously at my little brothers and then at my parents. The cool night breezes, the moon, that gentle and constant friend, and the calmness on my mother's face, however, reassured me and soon made me forget my fears. Keeping close to my parents and telling my brothers to do likewise, we pursued our way over the moonlit path. Throughout that night we tramped, only occasionally availing ourselves of a brief respite.

At last, a haze in the East announced the birth of a new morning and as the sun rose from behind the hills, the mule drivers informed us that we were not far from a village in which they said was a

caravanserai. In our impatience to reach it, we were hardly able to take our eyes off the hamlet ; in a short while however, we arrived within its pleasant confines, none the worse for our wanderings of the night before.

Half of that day we passed reclining on the carpets, and when the sun had passed its meridian, were once again treading the valleys and hill paths of Bukhtiari land. Sometimes we camped beside a brook which wound its way along the low-lying rocks, with the grass and bushes growing on its banks ; above us the sky, a turquoise blue, as it always is in Iran, while all around the plain, were the stern and silent mountains, keeping watch like sentinels over us.

Many a night we sought repose beneath a grove of trees or beside some sheltering rock, the mules and asses forming a circle, and within which we lay down to sleep, while our drivers mounted guard to protect us from those fearsome beasts, the bears and the hyænas. And when morning broke, the sun striking our faces, would rouse us from our slumbers—and what a glorious sunrise we have in Iran !

Awake ! for morning in the Bowl of Night  
Has flung the Stone that puts the stars to Flight ;  
And Lo ! the Hunter from the East has caught  
The Sultan's Turret in a Noose of Light !  
*(Rubaiyat of Omar Kayyam.)*

Before darkness set in, the mounts which had borne us on their backs throughout the day, were unsaddled, after which the conductors provided them with their fodder, and with handfuls of grass cut from the patches that grew around.

We could see in the distance a number of black tents pitched on a gentle slope, which we were informed were those of the Iliants, a nomad tribe, who roam as the gypsies do, all over Iran, eking out an existence by weaving carpets and rugs and breeding horses, mules, and other live stock. They make excellent soldiers and the Government drafts as many as it needs into the army. It is the Iliant, the Bakhtiari, the Tatar and other nomad tribes, that have always provided the armies of Iran with their finest fighting material. When properly led they are valiant fighters indeed. Nadir Shah proved to the world what stuff they were made of, when he conquered Herat, the Bakhtiari and the Guebr (Zoroastrian) contingents in that campaign, particularly distinguishing themselves for their intrepidity and valour.

Refreshed by a long rest, we resumed the night's tramp in a leisurely fashion and when morning broke, selected a spot near a running stream where we camped till such time as the caravan should take its departure.

Settling down, we presently spied a short distance away, an encampment, in which, were several men and women strangely garbed and with their children around them. They were seated on a carpet around a "samovar". The little ones upon noticing my brothers and myself, seemed to wish to make friends with us, whereupon we reported our discovery to our parents who decided to visit their camp and took us along with them. They proved to be Guebr or Zoroastrian travellers, who invited us to share their frugal fare

with them. The men were stalwart and the women affable and dignified, while their children, the very pictures of health, were collected around them.

Occasionally in Iran one comes across these interesting people scattered in small numbers in various parts of the country, true descendants of the Persians of old who ruled over a vast and glorious empire—against whom the Greeks long contended—the rival of Rome—of whom frequent mention is made in the Holy Writ and whose empire was finally extinguished by the Arabs during the Caliphate of Omar in the decisive battles of Kadisya and Nehavend in A. D. 637 and 641. With the flight of Yezdiguerd, the last of the Zoroastrian monarchs, Persia passed completely over to the rule of the Arabs.

After spending a pleasant hour with them rendered all the more cordial by having come across one another in such an unexpected place, we regretfully parted company. The three asses which bore me and my brothers in the journey, became very attached to us. We would feed them with grass collected from the roadside or hand them a little bread from our stock. They would push their noses right up to our faces, seeking for morsels of crumbs and would follow us about for the titbits in our hands. Each too, received a pet name to which they soon learnt to respond.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

Sunrise in Iran—Forests—Beauty of the scenery—  
A ruined strong-hold—A broad stream—The  
brown bird's song—The torrent—A rushing river.

The conductor of the caravan now came up and said he would like that we got ready again for the march; the mounts were refreshed and it would be wise, he said, to start without delay so as to make as much leeway as possible; accordingly we mounted our mules and rode away.

The slopes were covered with dwarf oak and the tamarisk, and wild acorns lay thick on the banks; no hamlets could be seen any where, nor were there any travellers passing on the road. A steady march brought us to a plot of level ground where we pulled up our mounts and dismounted. The air was sweet and refreshing and the spot restful, but the pleasure afforded us was only shortlived, for the stage had to be completed before the sun went down; before quitting this place, my brothers and myself passed the time collecting wild flowers and berries and stringing them together, made garlands of them for the three donkeys.

In our night wanderings we could never tell what the morrow would bring, whether we would obtain proper shelter or have just to camp out in an open meadow; often we had to be content to pass the night with no roof over our heads, except God's sky

above ; the weariness of the march would bring on a sense of overpowering sleep ; even a short spell of unbroken rest was ever so welcome to us.

In spite of the discomforts of the journey, there were however, a few undeniable charms, for the nights used to be lovely; the moon would shine brightly and light up the valleys and huge mountains that reposed so peacefully ; the countless stars above bespoke the beauty and wonder of God's works ; the pleasant odours from the forest would imbue us with feelings of cheerfulness and impart a refreshing fragrance to the air around. I would constantly gaze at the sky and watch the moon following us wherever we went.

Ah, moon of my Delight that know'st no wane

The moon of Heaven is rising once again :

( *Omar Kayyam, Kuza-Nama LXXIV.* )

I would marvel at the stars, the mountains and the forests. Is this then the big world they speak of ? The beauteous scenes around me, would make me feel happy as I trudged along beside my mount to the accompaniment of the tiny bells which tinkled melodiously in the night air.

I remember one night my mother calling out to me from some distance away, for the animals often outstripped one another. "Mary, why don't you get on to the donkey's back ?" "No mother," I replied, "I would rather walk, for he keeps falling and throwing me down."

We had not proceeded far, when in the bright moonlight we saw father some distance away standing

all alone beside a low wall, which he seemed to be attempting to step over. Owing to his weak eyesight, he was unable to see what lay beyond ; realising the danger he was in, I called out to him in alarm, "Father, stop! don't move! I am coming". I quickly ran up and held his hand. "Why, is not this the way?" he petulantly asked. "No father," I replied, "come with me", and I assisted him to the middle of the road. I then looked down the wall. The sight unnerved me and my senses seemed to reel, for there deep down lay a ravine, within which was what appeared to be a broad circular wall, all broken and overgrown with bushes and which surrounded a large pit. Decayed bricks and masonry lay scattered around in a confused mass, whilst a dense jungle lay beyond. I turned my face away for I dared not look at that awful place.

I cannot exactly say what it was, and have often tried to solve the mystery. In later years I inquired of those who had passed that way, and they told me that it was, in all probability, the ruins of some abandoned fortress, once the stronghold of some Bakhtiari chief, but the home now of wild beasts and snakes. I stood aghast to think what would have happened to father, had he stepped over that wall.

Travelling all night till dawn, this stage of our journey now came to an end. The mounts when unsaddled stood listless through exhaustion. We had alighted upon a plot on which grew a few straggling shrubs which the drivers uprooted, and then levelling the ground, spread our carpets upon it ; we stretched



ourselves upon them and very quickly deep sleep came to us.

Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep !

( *E. Young* )

It was now morning and the sun was shining on our faces ; it woke me from my slumbers, but I lay quietly on the rug with my eyes open watching the rest still asleep. I then sat up and roused them. As we rose to our feet, we noticed a broad stream flowing some distance away. "Mother, let us go and fetch water from it" we asked. "You may, but I must go with you" she said.

Joyfully we bent our steps towards the stream, carrying in our hands two small pitchers. Its banks were studded with rocks—the cool breeze blew upon our faces and the waves danced on the surface of the waters. Numerous water-fowls hovered over its swift-flowing current, or with wings flapping, seemed as though standing upon it. Stooping down, we drank our fill and then filling the pitchers, returned to camp.

Before we partook of our morning meal, a pleasant surprise awaited us, for as we sat in a circle on the rugs, a flood of melody burst upon our ears. What could that be ? we wondered. "Hush children !" mother signed to us, "it is the nightingale ('bulbool')". Somewhere among the branches, that little brown bird was pouring forth its soul in music, sometimes joyous and sometimes plaintive and so rich and powerful, that the valley echoed with its melody. In Iran are many sweet songsters, but above them all is the "bulbool", supreme in the power and variety of its

song, the ever-recurring theme of the poets and minstrels of Persia.

Our journey continued for some days over hills and through mountain passes, often having to thread our way cautiously past those awful chasms and precipices; one false step would have hurled us into eternity. Rushing torrents and noisy cascades frequently barred our progress, while their angry waters seemed to roar out deep and defiant warnings: "Stand aside, you puny mortals! why come you to these solitudes?" they seemed to threaten and command. In the embrace of their icy waters was death.

The paths rose as steadily as they fell, but our surefooted mounts never once made a false step. Soon the caravan kept traversing a region even wilder than that which we had been through before. In entering a wood, mother complained of a headache. "You had better rest, mother," I said to her, so dismounting, we sat upon a fallen tree trunk; she laid her head upon my lap and after a little while, said she felt better, whereupon we rose to seek our mounts, but to our dismay found they had disappeared, having presumably moved off to join their companions. A good distance away were father and the little boys marching along, quite unaware of the fact that we had been left behind, and although we kept bawling out to the muleteers to halt, they continued to advance. Presently a traveller who happened to be passing by, stopped to inquire. We explained to him our plight and asked him to run up and bring one of the muleteers along. He forthwith ran and overtook the

cavalcade and soon one of the conductors riding a mule, came up to us, leading a spare animal, which we mounted and quickly joined our party.

Travelling for some hours, brought us to a green field in which we camped ; beside it flowed a raging stream by whose banks we lay, while the gentle breeze blowing on our faces, brought sleep to all except myself. I lay awake, for the roaring of the waters as they rushed through the gorge, filled me with fear. Would they overwhelm us ? I closed my eyes, but sleep would not come.

Why dost thou wildly rush and roar

Mad river, O mad river ?

Wilt thou not pause and cease to pour

Thy hurrying, headlong waters o'er

This rocky shelf for ever ?

*(Longfellow.)*

Then burying my face under the coverlet, so as to shut out the sounds, I heard no more their angry roars and sleep soon came to me. "Shelter us, (O Lord) with the shelter of thy wings ; chase away from us every enemy and foe".

Right through that night we slumbered, the drivers keeping guard over us and when the twittering of birds at dawn roused us from sleep, we knew it was morning again. After a bath and a hasty meal, we were ready once again for the road.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

A benighted Persian girl—Charm of the meadows—  
Sounds that disturb the solitude—Robber chiefs—  
Their methods—An incident—Another change of plan  
—An accident—Cold biting winds—An encampment.

Up to midday we toiled without a break, and just as the muleteers were seeking for a suitable spot where the caravan could rest, an unexpected incident occurred.

On the high road, a short distance away, the solitary figure of a young Persian woman appeared. As we approached her, she came up timidly to my mother and in a respectful way presented her with a handful of fruit, informing her at the same time that she was a traveller on the road and that having got separated from her people, did not now know her way about; she begged to be allowed to remain with us, till such time as she should come across them again.

Slim in figure and a brunette of agreeable presence, she was a true type of the fair sex of Iran. Pitying her forlorn plight, my mother invited her to our camp, intending to make her over at the next stage to some respectable people who would help her to return to her home. Winsome and of a gentle disposition, she showed a willingness to put her hand to anything that had to be done on the march, and this led us to take a great liking to her.

After being with us for some days, we one

afternoon suddenly missed her. Mounting a mule, one of the charvadars scoured the countryside, we as well assisting in the search, but no trace of her could be found anywhere. She had mysteriously disappeared ! After loitering in camp for some time, we at length abandoned all hope of finding her and continued our journey. What had become of Gulinar (Cherry), for that was her name ? A strange acquaintance indeed, whom we had made in such an unexpected place, and who had now as strangely disappeared ! We never saw her any more.

When the rose perishes

Say to it 'Depart with our valedictions !'

*(Ode from Diwan of Hafiz.)*

We were now passing through a small grove of mulberry trees, and that was a happy day for us children, for we kept loitering beneath the branches, and plucking and eating the delicious fruit.

The Bakhtiari country which the traveller passes through, is of a varied character. Parts consist of broad fields and meadows on which grow the elm, poplar, willow, the chenar, as also most of the trees that are found in temperate climes ; the rose grows luxuriantly, and the sweet-briar which emits a powerful and rich scent is also frequently seen.

Other portions of the country on the other hand, are wild and inhospitable, consisting of sparsely wooded tracts or bare treeless wastes, mountains, passes, gorges, swift flowing streams and resounding cascades.

At nightfall strange sounds strike the ear of the traveller—the laugh of the hyæna, the barking of deer

or perchance the moan of the Persian bear. In winter the howling of wolves strikes terror into the heart of man and beast, and it is then that the mules cower and tremble and the grim charvadars invoke the name of Allah.

Upon descending the track at sundown, the leader of the caravan pointed to a distant hill and said it was the abode of Orojani Bey, a Lur chieftan as he preferred to call him. Orojani Bey ! Orojani Bey ! the name seemed familiar to our ears—then we remembered whom he meant, for we had heard of this dreaded robber from our very infant days—of the many caravans that he had plundered—of the travellers whom he had waylaid and robbed, as they journeyed through the Bakhtiari country.

Strange acts have on the other hand been recorded of him ; for, though never failing to despoil his victims of everything they may possess, even to the very clothing on their persons, he would, at times, show kindness and generosity to the needy and deserving, a veritable Robin Hood of Iran !

The thieves and bandits who inhabit these mountains have a way of their own ; having spotted their prey they suddenly appear before him ; armed to the teeth, their presence is sufficient to strike terror into the stoutest heart, and in commanding tones they challenge their victims in the following characteristic fashion :—

“Haminjah voice ! (stop :)—Az jaw-ath thakoon nahkhor ! (dont move from here !)—Har che dareded, dar beyor ! (whatever you have bring out !)—Agar

har chee daree, dar nayyoree, m-khosh-am-ed !”  
(if you do not give up what you have, I will kill you !)

Overcome with fear the traveller makes over everything he possesses. It is useless to resist, for should any opposition be offered, they kill without hesitation.

I have a sister, about whom I have spoken in the first chapter of this story. She, her husband and their little daughter were once travelling over the same route as we were pursuing, when suddenly a band of robbers waylaid them and soon took everything they possessed ; they then attempted to remove the shoes from the feet of both my sister and the child ; terrified, the little girl began to cry, whereupon my brother-in-law addressed the robbers thus :—

“You khans ( chieftains ) of this country have never been known to harm women and children ! How is it that you are wishing to remove even the shoes on my wife’s and daughter’s feet ?”

These words had the desired effect, for, ashamed of their conduct, they desisted and allowed them to retain their shoes and proceed on their way.

Orojani Bey, Orojani Bey, we children kept repeating to one another—the name seeming so pleasing and musical to our ears. “Hush children ! Don’t utter his name !” mother whispered to us, “the charvadars belong to the same tribe !” Then I understood and a feeling of great fear took hold of me. What if he were to come and take us away ! I kept thinking. Creeping close up to my father, I whispered my

troubled thoughts to him. He calmed my fears and I communicated to my brothers what he said.

At sunset the chief muleteer suggested a change of plan ; it would be better, he said, if we performed the journey henceforth by night, with only a short march in the very early mornings, his reason being that he wished to avoid the mules and asses having to march the greater part of the day under the hot broiling sun; they needed more rest as they had now been reduced almost to the condition of skeletons. But later, we guessed the true reason, for the country through which we were now travelling, had a particularly evil reputation, being infested with thieves and marauders.

Throughout the day they prowl among the hill sides, their keen, practised eyes scouring the mule tracks for their unsuspecting victims ; at sunset these worthy folk retire to their strongholds to pass the night in the company of their children and women folk. To this suggestion of the charvadars we made no objection, although we knew it was likely to prolong the journey considerably.

That night we lodged in a serai and when morning broke ,the usual preparations for the march were again gone through. It was now time to resume the early morning tramp; so mounting our asses and mules, we rode over a level road and it was some hours before we found ourselves again approaching the hills, where, having arrived, we stopped but once to snatch a hasty meal ; and when on the march again, the animals, one moving faster than the other, caused us to get separated.



My mother's mount had advanced a considerable distance and the donkey which I rode, followed next, while those which bore my father and my brothers lagged far behind, with the muleteers bringing up the rear; this caused us therefore to lose sight of one another.

Our course now lay over rising ground, and as I took a sharp turn, I discovered to my alarm my mother lying on the road pinned down and unable to move, with the hoofs of the mule she had been riding, planted on her chest. "What is the matter mother?" I anxiously enquired. "I have fallen off the mule—call the charvadars quickly", was all that she was able to utter. I shouted to the muleteers at the top of my voice to come to our aid and forthwith one of them ran up and driving the creature away, assisted her to her feet.

The road now lay over ground sometimes level and sometimes ascending steeply, with the march continuing till the sun was well above the horizon; then in accordance with the new plans, we broke journey and took shelter in the nearest village, where securing suitable quarters, we passed the day resting. At the setting of the sun, the journey for the night began again and as we rode along, the darkness increased, for the moon had not yet risen and only the stars were visible.

The asses which bore Martin and myself, had outpaced the others and so had caused us to advance a considerable distance away from the rest.

A cold wind which blew with a low muffled moan, distressed us, so tired and shivering, we thought we would dismount and wait for the rest to come up. Getting off from the saddles, we sat by the roadside with our hands folded across our knees and our heads resting on them and huddled close to each other for the sake of warmth. Still shivering, we longed for the comfort of a warm bed and soon the cold and exhaustion sent us into deep sleep.

Suddenly the clattering of hoofs and the tinkling of bells roused me. "Mercy on us, and for us to be asleep!" I muttered reproachfully to myself. I roused Martin and said to him, "How fortunate for us to have escaped!"—for, had we continued sleeping, the advancing mules would assuredly have trampled us under foot. Then looking round we discovered that our donkeys had moved off and disappeared in the gloom. The rest of the party had meanwhile come up, so keeping close together, we continued our march. We had not proceeded far, when the glow of a light appeared in the distance and upon approaching it noticed in a meadow a company of Persian country folk huddled together around a fire, cooking their evening meal.

Cold and tired we envied them the warmth they enjoyed and as our little caravan kept moving along, the recollection of the dangers and hardships which we had gone through, came once again to me. "When are our travels going to end?" I despairingly asked myself. "Wait, little girl, wait—your journey shall soon end—a little more and....."

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## CHAPTER XV.

The night march—Meadows and ponds—The rainbow—A boulder-strewn valley—Wild wailings—We meet old friends—A Persian garden.

In accordance with the plans suggested by the muleteer, the journey continued throughout the night with only an occasional halt, and when the sun in the early morning had illumined the crests of the hills, our caravan roused itself to speed on its way again.

Before us stretched a sheet of water and upon being told that we would have to cross it, I felt uneasy, thinking of the dangers that might be in store for us. Mother kept warning us to sit far back, lest a lurch on the part of the mounts would plunge us into the stream, and as we kept crossing it, with the water reaching up to the bellies of our asses, I could not help but fix my eyes nervously on the surface of the water. When, however, the opposite bank had been reached in safety, a feeling of relief came over me. Some distance away was a pond; obtaining our parents' consent and promising that we would not approach too near its edge, we joyfully tripped along.

Many a time in the course of our travels, we would alight upon some enchanting spot, on which grew trees and shrubs covered with wild flowers of the richest tints, or we would come across some winding rivulet with its banks overgrown with flower-laden bushes and which, meandering along lazily, would then disappear from our view.

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows  
Quite canopied with luscious woodbine  
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.

(*Wm. Shakespeare*)

Upon their banks lay those rounded, coloured pebbles, which we would collect and when resting in some caravanserai, arrange in patterns on the ground.

There were those ponds too, with the water lilies floating on their surface in a most tantalising manner and which, with the aid of a stick, we were able to draw to the water's edge and bear away to camp.

To such spots as these we would venture without fear, for how could any wild beast, we thought, ever choose to make its home in such delightful retreats? The pond we had just visited was muddy, but since we needed water, there was no choice left but to fill up the jars and water-bags.

After a brisk morning tramp, the mounts began to show signs of fatigue, so keeping a look out we selected a spot where we camped till the setting of the sun.

The whole of that day was passed in quiet repose, the mules and asses being tethered around a large circle, with the conductors outside the ring; and shortly before the sun had sunk behind the hills, the muleteers saddled up the mounts and lined them in front in marching order. Hardly had an hour elapsed when dark threatening clouds gathered above, accompanied by vivid flashes of lightning.

It now became a matter of deep concern to us where we should find shelter, in case the storm burst upon us. The rain fell with violent suddenness, but soon to our relief the clouds drifted away, and presently the rainbow appeared in all its splendour, one foot of that arch springing from the brow of a high hill far away, and the other losing itself in the hazy distance, behind the mountains.

We gazed in wonderment at this manifestation of one of the glorious works of God.

"Do you know?—that is where God and his angels live"—I remarked to my brothers. "No, that is the road to heaven" they asserted, seeming to know better than myself. But we know now, what is is!

Having remained in the sky for some length of time, it suddenly to our disappointment, vanished.

When science from Creation's face  
Enchantment's veil withdraws,  
What lovely visions yield their place  
To cold material laws!

(*Thos. Campbell. "To the Rainbow."*)

My ass having meantime outstripped the others, I suddenly saw, stretching before me, a treeless expanse and as I approached it, there came to view a strange and awe-inspiring sight; the valley was strewn with large boulders of rock of weird and fantastic shapes, recalling to mind the forms of monsters of a bygone age. I could not understand what they were, and they filled me with fear and wonder.

Urged by curiosity however, I timidly advanced

and touched one of them—it was burning hot—for the rays of the sun had been playing on it all day. What could they be? I wondered. I stood rooted to the spot, with the sense of fear still upon me, when the tinkling of the bells of the approaching mules, reassured me. Then quickly running up to our party, I took care to keep as close to them as I could, for the rest of that stage.

In after years, I understood what those uncanny objects were; they were boulders that had been deposited there in remote ages past, by the action of glaciers, which had carried them down from the mountain sides to the valley below.

On this night an unpleasant experience befell us, for from the bushes and recesses beyond, cries like those of an infant struck our ears. Was it some little child that had got lost in the jungle and was crying for its mother? we children wondered. Soon the sounds seemed like those of some demented woman; then followed horrible sobs and moans, which would be impossible for me to describe. The mules and donkeys appeared uneasy, for they instinctively knew what it was, and the conductors of our caravan remarked aloud to one another “Khaftar! Khafter!” (the hyaena! the hyaena!).

Picking up stones, they hurled them together with volleys of abuse in the direction of the sounds—immediately the moanings ceased and for the rest of that night, we were not troubled any longer by those distressing cries.

The hyaena of Iran is a formidable brute, much

dreaded on account of its strength and ferocity ; it is much larger than the Indian variety and will not hesitate to attack a solitary traveller or even the cottager in his lonely tenement.

Shortly after, the moon rose and the stars, one by one, peeped from the heavens ; we felt happy for it reminded us of the rambles we would make on moonlight nights in Isfahan, with the high Sophie hill in the distance.

Sometimes plodding along and sometimes resting, we passed the night under the star spangled heavens and at dawn the hills around looked just lovely ; the stars kept growing fainter and fainter, till they gradually faded away and in the far distance the horizon was turning a lovely rose pink.

If thou would'st read a lesson that will keep

Thy heart from fainting and thy soul from sleep

Go to the woods and hills ! No tears

Dim the sweet look that Nature wears.

*(Longfellow)*

At this stage of the journey, it was decided that that we should resume travelling by day, as the roads were now safer. From this point onwards they gradually dipped, and it appeared as though we were at last going to leave the mountains behind, and enter into more level tracts.

At the approach of evening, we discovered that a good deal of ground had been covered, so dismounting at a village, we engaged quarters for the night. It was larger than most we had hitherto seen and here lived some friends whom we had known in Isfahan.

My mother decided to visit them the following morning, but father preferred to remain in the serai. The road to their place passed by a field, where the village folk were at work. Soon we approached the building and stopping in front of it, knocked at the gate. An elderly lady answered our call and directly she discovered who we were, invited us to her snug little home. Her husband happened to be away on business, and after a little conversation, she asked us to join her in her morning repast. I missed father, for had he too, been present, it would have been so cheering for him, after having been deprived of the company of friends for so many weary days.

When we rose from the table, she asked me to sing and I sang something that I had been taught in school; she next asked me if I could dance; without any fuss I danced the "Handkerchief dance" which I had learnt at home. A few pleasant hours having thus been spent together, we bade her goodbye and returned to our lodgings; on the way we noticed a garden and finding the gate open, entered it. In front was a large plot on which grew rose bushes bearing blossoms of red, white, and yellow and whose sweet scent filled the garden with perfume. The tulip and the jasmine grew in patches on the lawn, while that exquisite and sweet-smelling flower the narcissus, decked the borders of the pathway.

I sometime think that never blows so red  
The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled;  
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears  
Dropt in its Lap from some once lovely Head.  
(*Omar Kayyam. Stanza VIII.*)



A few cypresses, the cherry, and a number of ornamental and fruit trees, imparted an added charm to this pretty garden.

Presently a short, sturdy man wearing a red beard and with a fat round face, came up and addressing us in the Persian language, invited us to walk through the garden. After a pleasant ramble through its extensive grounds, we made ready to depart, but before quitting the place he presented us with a quantity of fruit and addressed my mother thus:—"Khanum : (i. e. madam) my wife and children live here—would you like to see them?" "I should be very pleased," replied my mother, "but as it is getting late, I shall come round with my children to morrow." "Upon my head!" (Pers : equiv : of "with much pleasure") he remarked. The following morning saw us out again at an early hour, and we did not forget the promise we had made to the red-bearded gentleman. We found his wife the Khanum, busy over her household duties and with her four children playing in the garden. After the usual commonplace conversation we bade her goodbye and returned to our quarters. Having tarried in this place for a few days, the quiet and rest seemed to have given us a new lease of life.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

The never-ending journey—Shepherds and their flocks—Herds of cattle—A stream—An encampment—Fellow travellers—A depressing region—The “bulbool”—Gypsies—A wood—“Your journey shall soon end :”—Nearing the plains—We enter Dizful—A view of Susa, the Shushan of the Holy Writ—Ahasuerus the king—Vashti the queen and Esther the Jewish maid—Extract from the book of Esther,

Although the sun had not yet risen and the mist was still hanging about, the muleteers kept impatiently urging us to get ready for the march. When I realised that we would now have to leave our warm beds, with our eyes still closing with sleep, and that we would soon be having to ride for miles at a stretch through those wild tracts and to face too those cold winds that blew across the roads, a feeling of great depression came over me. Was this journey never then going to end ! I kept asking myself. Having proceeded some distance, mother complained again of a racking pain in her head. That omen of the **Falling Stars** was now once again revealing itself ! It as quickly vanished !

A couple of hours later, brought us to the shelter of a cosy dell, which was the first break in the day's march. The bushes around were still wet with dew. The mounts were knee-strung and led to a grassy patch, while their keepers, sitting a little distance away, commenced to eat their morning meal. Flocks of sheep, attended by the shepherd boys, and strings of asses with herds of cattle, were ascending the slopes,

each wending its way to its own particular grazing ground. The sun having now well risen, its rays dispelled the mists, that had gathered around. The muleteer advised us to get on the move, for there was, he said, a shallow stream an hour's journey away, from which we could replenish our stock. Accordingly we struck camp, and after marching forward at a brisk pace, our eyes were gladdened by the sight of the tranquil waters of the stream, about which he had spoken.

Upon our arrival at its banks, the leather bags and pitchers were filled and strapped to the saddles of the pack mules. There was no boat to take us across and for us children to attempt to wade through, was not advisable, so father said he would carry us on his back, one at a time. My mother who was mounted on a mule, found no difficulty to cross the shallow water. At each trip that father made, I could hear him utter a short prayer, and childlike I asked him the reason. "My child" he replied, "I keep praying to God to help me to carry you safely across".

Having crossed it, we met some distance away, a party of lads who were on their way to India ; grouped round a fire they were preparing their meal ; presently one of them came up and presented us with a quantity of roasted nuts. Being all of about the same age, they seemed to be having quite a good time. The mounts having meantime been saddled up, and the pack mules loaded with our belongings, we are ready again to resume our march.

We passed a little Persian girl in a field, plucking

mint leaves and upon our questioning her, she replied that it was her daily task to collect them for the market. We now noticed a number of travellers approaching and when within speaking distance, discovered they were friends who were returning from the coast; a little friendly conversation followed, after which we parted company, wishing one another God-speed. As they marched away, I kept wistfully gazing at them and thinking how fortunate they were to be returning to their homes in Iran, while we, on the other hand, were wandering about in a strange land among strangers. As I turned to join my people, lo! they had already departed and were a considerable distance away. "Mercy!" I muttered to myself, and clenching my fists to brace myself up, ran like a hare after them, but a stone having caught my foot I was sent sprawling on the ground; in a second I was up, and although I ran a considerable distance, I could not catch them up. Out of breath, I was just going to cry, when I saw the old muleteer mounted on a mule, trotting down the road towards me. He put me on the creature's back and brought me to my people again.

Hitherto in our wanderings, we had traversed the wild rugged regions of the province of Khuzistan, but at this point of our journey the entire scene had changed, for stretching far in all directions, the country appeared to be more level than hitherto and to which our caravan was proceeding. We were now treading the low foot hills which would, we hoped, bring us to the flat open country and so, nearer to the end of our journey. The rocky hillsides and hollows were over-

grown with dwarf oak, tamarisk bushes and wild shrubs, and all around were unsightly and confused masses of earth and rock, overgrown with jungle. In this depressing region we stumbled along, with not a bright feature to enliven the landscape, while the oppressive heat and the clouds of red dust that covered us, added to the discomforts of the march ; so dispiriting was the effect, that none of us cared to speak and with our faces set, tramped along.

But hark ! once again those dulcet sounds from the throat of the little brown bird ! They echoed through the desolation around and brought consolation to our hearts. I will not attempt to describe its song—such among you, dear readers as have in your experience heard the nightingale, will understand. “Bul-bool asth !” (it is the ‘bul-bool’) exclaimed one of the muleteers with a broad grin on his rugged face. These rough, untutored men, seemed to have fallen under the spell of those magic notes.

Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast  
To soften rocks or bend a knotted oak.

( *Wm. Congreve.* )

Our caravan came to a standstill, and although we tried hard to find her, she remained concealed among the branches. Lingering for a brief space of time, we took to the red dusty road again, the melody the while filling the valley with its entrancing harmonies.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows

The grass, the thicket and the fruit tree wild ;  
 While hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine ;  
 Fast-fading violets, cover'd up in leaves ;  
 And mid-May's eldest child,  
 The coming musk--rose, full of dewy wine,  
 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird !  
 No hungry generations tread thee down :  
 The voice I heard this passing night was heard  
 In ancient days by emperor and clown :  
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,  
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn ;  
 The same that oft-times hath  
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the form  
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

\* \* \* \* \*

Adieu ! adieu ! thy plaintive anthem fades  
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
 Up the hillside, and now 'tis buried deep  
 In the next valley-glades ;  
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream ?  
 Fled is that music—do I wake or sleep ?

John Keats.

( *Ode to a Nightingale* )

This was a day of pleasant experiences indeed. We were approaching now a field on which grew a solitary "chenar" and as we drew near, a band of gypsies who had made their encampment beneath its branches, came to view. Their cooking pots, bundles, soiled rugs, and articles of stock-in-trade, lay scattered about on the turf. Some goats and donkeys were

tethered to wooden pegs driven into the ground, while a number of dogs of low degree, part and parcel of the families, lay asleep in close proximity to the infants and urchins of the camp, and undoubtedly on the most affectionate terms with them.

The men lay stretched on their much begrimed rugs, some half asleep and the rest smoking in ease and comfort, while the women, clad in their picturesque habiliments with rows of coins over their foreheads and around their necks, were busy at their round of duties.

The gypsy women lack the beauty and grace of the true Persian or nomad females of Iran, possessing however bright black eyes, pearly teeth and rosy complexions. The little ones were at play, rigged up in cast-off clothing, much too large for them, but looking, in spite of the grime on their faces, and the slow but perpetual stream that issued from their nostrils, the very pictures of health; roguish-eyed and ruddy-cheeked, we could hardly keep them away.

One of the men upon seeing us approach, commenced to play on the "choongoor", a Persian musical instrument, accompanying the music with a well-known and popular song—I recollect only a few lines of the refrain.

He will not return ! he will not return !

Abul Ghassem will return no more ;

They say at Shiraz, they say at Shiraz,

The \*Shah-zadeh has cut off his head,

He will return no more, Abul Ghassem will return no more.

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\* Shah-zadeh—Pers : the Prince

It is a refrain, in which a woman coming to hear of the death of her spouse at the hands of the Prince Governor, gives way to lamentations and invokes his name. The air was tuneful and the rough charvaders, within whom the spark divine was not entirely absent, broke out into a chorus of applause, "Merhavah ! merhavah !" (i. e. bravo ! bravo !)

The urchins to whom we had handed biscuits and copper coins, gathered round us, tugging at our skirts and even putting their dirty little hands into our pockets, in search of money. "See-ray Khoda—bedeh ! See-ray Khoda—bedeh !" (for the love of God—give !) they kept importuning us. As we were leaving these interesting people, I came in for a fit of sneezing which caused the leader of the caravan to call a halt, for among the peoples of the East, it is considered as presaging evil should one in a company sneeze, when about to perform a journey or for the matter of that, to begin any undertaking whatsoever. Accordingly we turned back and resumed our conversation with the gypsies, and when the muleteer felt that the evil spell had passed, we turned to the road again and soon the encampment disappeared from view.

For many a weary hour we plodded along, and when exhaustion came over us, the muleteers led the mounts to a grassy plot where they were relieved of their burdens ; here they collected some dry twigs with which a rousing fire was made, and then placing the kettle upon it, tea was soon made.

Later my brothers and myself thought we would



stroll up to the edge of the wood, which was only a short distance away. We were not afraid and we could see numerous birds twittering merrily among the branches. Dead leaves and twigs covered the ground; at times I thought it would be unsafe for us to visit that spot, even though our camp was only a stone's throw away, for snakes and wild beasts often lurk in such places. But I brushed those thoughts away, confident that no harm would come to us. Lingered a while we retraced our steps to the camp, where we found our four-footed companions of the march had already been saddled up, ready for the journey.

As we kept tramping along the solitary road, a fit of despondency once again took hold of me. I glanced at my brothers and was moved to pity upon seeing the look of innocence on their faces, and I noticed too how the weariness of the march was telling upon them. Then the thought came again forcefully to me; "When is this long journey going to end?" It had lasted for over three weeks and yet we were no nearer its end. I wanted to cry, but checked my tears. "Wait little girl, wait!—Your journey shall soon end! not in the way that you or your parents have wished, but in the way that God, in accordance with His inscrutable plans, had willed it should be!"

Our wanderings which hitherto had been over ranges of towering mountains, and in regions wild and and full of perils, were now at length bringing us to a country which seemed less stern and forbidding than that which we had just been toiling through.

For more than three weeks, our little caravan which included three children of tender ages, had been roaming amidst dangers and discomforts, all of which my parents had never for once believed, could have come our way. Ordinarily the journey to the level tracts takes about ten days to perform, instead of the three weeks into which it had been spread, the reason being, as we were told later, that the chief muleteer who had several wives and children in various parts of the country, had been visiting each of his homes, thus leading our caravan along unfrequented and circuitous routes.

The journey over these bewildering mountains having thus happily come to an end, we needed to fear no more those awful precipices and rushing torrents that so often terrified us, neither would those big brown bears that roam over the lonely hills, feeding on the forest fruits and on the tender ears of the corn and maize, nor the wily hyaena which batters on the carcasses of the wild ass and the caravan mules which perish on the way, ever come near us again; we were safe too, from those cruel and ever watchful Lur robbers.

It was for these reasons that father was always silent and low-spirited, for he had realised, unfortunately too late, the false step we had taken.

All of a sudden one of the conductors called out:—"There is Dizful!" A steady march along the hill-sides brought us to the outskirts of this town, and in a little while we entered it. Dizful is situated on the river Ab-i-Diz, a tributary of the Karun,

spanned by a noble bridge of stone, erected probably in Sassanian times. Its population consists of Persians, Arabs and Lurs who number about 12,000 souls, the town hardly differing from many of its kind in Iran. The bazars are stocked with the produce of the hills and a variety of the choicest fruits, is obtained here. We tarried in the serai for a few days, after which our wanderings southwards began again.

In this portion of the journey, strings of mules and asses and flocks of sheep and goats passed by. Here too, could be seen numerous field birds, which throughout the day winged their way across the open country in search of nutriment. After a march of about three hours, we came upon an uninhabited plain overgrown with wild grsses and scrub, and upon which stood, like giant sepulchres, gazing at us in solemn silence, the mournful mounds of Susa, the Shushan of Biblical times, beneath which have lain for over twentyfive centuries, the ruins of one of the most wonderful cities of the world, the royal seat of the Achaemenian sovereigns of Persia, which later was further embellished by Shapur II of the Sassanian dynasty. It was at Susa that Alexander the Great of Macedon, after destroying the might of Persia, occupied the throne of Darius I and his successors, thus confirming before the eyes of the world, the military genius and the spirit of the Hellenic race.

Let me quote from the Book of Esther, just as it appears in the Holy Writ, the glories of the Persian empire, the splendour of the court of Susa

and the might of its great monarch Ahasuerus (Xerxes) who "reigned from India even unto Ethiopia over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces . . .

That in those days when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace . . . ; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces being before him . . . . when the king showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and four score days . . . where were white, green and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver upon pavement of red and blue and white and black marble . . . . and they gave them drink in vessels of gold (the vessels being diverse one from another) and royal wine in abundance . . . . Also Vashti the queen, made a feast for the women in the royal house, which belonged to king Ahasuerus . . . . On the seventh day when the heart of the King was merry with wine, he commanded . . . . the great chamberlains . . . . to bring Vashti the queen, before the king with the crown royal, to show the people and the princes her beauty . . . . But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains; therefore was the king very wroth and his anger burned in him . . . ." and for her disobedience a royal command was given that "Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus ;

and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she . . . . And in her place was brought before the king, Hadassa, that is Esther, . . . . and the maid was fair and beautiful . . . and the maiden pleased him . . . . and the king loved Esther above all the women."

Amid such unparalleled scenes of royal pomp and splendour, did the monarchs and nobles of Persia revel, till their empire was overthrown by Alexander the Macedonian, perhaps the mightiest conqueror of all times, and who is said to have removed treasure worth over ten millions in pounds sterling, from this city alone.

Shushan survived but not for long, for with the passing of years, inevitable decay set in and now nothing remains of that wondrous city, save these mounds of desolation. The mansions that once graced it, lie in ruins deep beneath the soil, covered over by these giant sepulchres, which entomb the dead.

Amidst the rank jungle and grasses, roam the fierce-eyed lynx, the hyaena and the wild pig ; in the gloom of night, the screeching owl proclaims aloud the passing away of this City Beautiful.

They say the Lion and the Lizard keep  
The courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep  
And Bahram that great hunter—the wild ass  
Stamps o'er his Head and he is fast asleep.

For in and out, about, below  
'Tis nothing but a Magic shadow show  
Played in a Box whose candle is the Sun  
Round which we Phantom Figures come and go.  
( *Rubayat of Omar Kayyam.* )

Vashti reposes peaceful and undisturbed beneath the soil of Shushan, and none know where. Esther and Mordecai are buried in \* Hamadan ( Ecbatana ) where she lies ever disturbed and insecure, peered at by the eyes of the idle and curious, and exposed to the insults of fanatical mobs.

The tomb is unpretentious, guarded by Jewish rabbis, who for a small pittance, are willing to point to the traveller, the actual spot in which she lies.

Vashti, the wrongs that have been done to you, have indeed been avenged !

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\* A city in North-west Persia.

## CHAPTER XVII.

The prophecy of Daniel—"Belshazzar's grave is made ....."—We arrive at Shuster, a city of past renown—Shapur the Persian monarch and Valerian the captive Emperor of Rome—Ancient monuments and ruins—We pass Tembi—Approach the Anglo-Iranian Company's oil fields—Steel derricks—Hillsides covered with wild narcissi and poppies—We enter Musjid Suleiman, centre of the oil fields.

Susa lies near the banks of the river Kerkha. It is commonly believed by the people of Persia, that Daniel the prophet lies buried in the bed of that river. His tomb stands near it and is venerated by the followers of Islam. That Daniel lies buried in Shushan (Susa) is by no means improbable, for after mighty Babylon had fallen to the Medes and Persians and Darius had ascended the throne, Daniel was raised to the highest rank amongst the Princes and Governors in the Great King's realms. At his death therefore, he may have found sepulture in the spot where his tomb now stands.

As our little caravan threaded its way through these scenes of desolation, with the tomb of Daniel in close proximity, it brought to one's mind that ancient Babylon of the Chaldees which lies to the west of Susa, buried and forgotten, the wonder of the nations of antiquity, a city of great palaces and temples, and whose opulence and power had so impressed the nations of the world, that they believed her kingdom could never pass away, but would endure for ever.

Belshazzar the last of her monarchs, feasting in the royal banquet hall of the palace, saw the "fingers of a man's hand" writing "over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall" those brief and mystical words :—

### Mene, Mene, Tekel, Uparshin.

In all that land famed for its lore, no seer of Chaldea could expound the meaning of those momentous words. "Then was Daniel," a captive in the land "brought in before the King" and when commanded to "make known the interpretation thereof" did expound the meaning of the writing in these prophetic words :—

**Mene** ; God has numbered thy Kingdom and  
finished it :

**Tekel** ; Thou art weighed in the balances and  
art found wanting :

**Peres** ; Thy kingdom is divided and given to the  
Medes and Persians.

Byron has immortalised this scene in the following beautiful stanzas :—

In that hour and hall  
The fingers of a hand  
Came forth against the wall  
And wrote as if on sand :  
The fingers of a man—  
A solitary hand  
Along the letters ran  
And traced them like a wand.

The monarch saw and shook  
And bade no more rejoice ;  
All bloodless waxed his look,  
And tremulous his voice ;



"Let the men of lore appear  
The wisest of the earth,  
And expound the words of fear  
Which mar our royal mirth."

A captive in the land,  
A stranger and a youth,  
He heard the King's command,  
He saw that writing's truth ;  
The lamps around were bright,  
The prophecy in view,  
He heard it on that night—  
The morrow proved it true !

Belshazzar's grave is made  
His kingdom passed away  
He in the balance weighed  
Is light and worthless clay ;  
The shroud his robe of state,  
His canopy the stone ;  
The Mede is at his gate,  
The Persian on his throne !

Soon was that prophecy fulfilled to the letter, for Cyrus leading the hosts of Media and Persia, laid siege to the city and brought about its fall, the greatest siege and the greatest fall perhaps in all history.

"And, behold here cometh a chariot of men with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said : Babylon is fallen, is fallen ; and all the graven images of her gods, he hath broken unto the ground"  
*(Isaiah, XXI—9)*

Cyrus added this city to his empire and centuries later, it fell into the hands of Alexander of Macedon, who intoxicated with the splendour of his victories, gave way to unbridled orgies of intemperance, which

bringing on a malignant fever, cut him off in the prime of life.

The same desolation that meets the eye around Susa, is ever present here, for buried deep beneath the soil, Babylon lies hidden from the gaze of man.

Numerous streams crossed our path and the valleys now assumed the fresh green tints of summer, with signs of life and gladness everywhere. Halting at a few places to obtain rest, our caravan picked its way along and after a long and tiresome journey, it appeared as though we were approaching the outskirts of some city. The countryside around Shuster, for such it turned out to be, was in bygone days, covered with gardens and orchards, but these have with the decay that set in, in this seat of royalty, disappeared altogether.

At every turn, as we rode through the town, mounds of decayed bricks, tumbled-down walls and structures, met our eye ; altogether a scene of woeful desolation, as though some convulsion of nature had sounded the death-knell of this once famous city. Ravaged by Timur and with pestilences and famines following, it gradually sank, and now lives on its past fame—the squalor and waste which we were witnessing, attesting to its decay.

It was at Shuster, that the warlike Shapur reigned in splendour, warring against Rome and Asiatic Greece, for the supremacy of the East. To this city, the ill-starred Roman Emperor Valerian, after being vanquished by him at Edessa in A. D. 260, was brought as a captive before the conqueror in a golden

cage, and fettered in chains of the same precious metal. The royal prisoner was subjected to constant insults and indignities, being compelled to wait on the Persian monarch like a menial, and in the end, after being deprived of his eyesight, death relieved him of his wretched existence. In the rock carvings discovered in these regions, and which are as fresh today as when first chiselled out of the solid stone, Shapur is depicted as mounting his steed and using his royal captive who is crouching low, as a mounting stool.

Shuster is situated on the Karun river, spanned by the famous bridge and dam of Valerian, constructed from massive blocks of stone, hewn out of the solid rock, and so enduring that even after the lapse of over sixteen centuries, the bridge still stands as a monument to Shapur's passion for great engineering works. It is called Valerian's bridge, from the supposition that he commanded his royal captive to superintend the construction of this great undertaking.

There are other relics of great historical interest in and around this city, and much as I would like to speak in greater detail regarding them, I must for reasons of expediency, allude to only a few and that too, briefly.

Upon a high rocky promontory, rising sheer from the river bed, stands the castle or citadel surrounded by gardens and a park, in which a few old cannon ornament the grounds, one of which was cast in the reign of Nadir Shah. Artificial canals, cut in those far off days for the purpose of regulating the outflow

of water from the Karun, still irrigate the country around, testifying to the remarkable engineering skill of those days.

Shortly before leaving the Bakhtiari hills and upon approaching the plains, we would at times come across steep and high rocks, on whose smooth surface chiselled out of the stone, were depicted scenes commemorating the deeds and triumphs of the ancient monarchs of Persia. A curious script cut into the stone, recounted their deeds and royal edicts. My mother would often point out to us these wonderful carvings, and try to explain in simple language how they came into existence in those far off days when Iran was a mighty empire, ruled by the Guebers or Fire-worshippers.

During our stay at Shuster, we visited Valerian's bridge, the citadel, and other places of interest; the coppersmiths form a large and flourishing community; cheap carpets, leather goods, silver and brass ware, and various other manufactures, are obtainable in this town.

The Shusteri is half Arab and half Persian, and had earned until a few years back, the reputation of being quarrelsome and extremely fanatical. The women are considered beautiful, combining the comeliness of the Iranian women, with the grace of their Arab sisters. A small colony of Armenian merchants reside in this town, who welcomed us and took us round to view the sights and objects of interest. The few days' rest at Shuster having done my mother good, it was decided that we should no

longer tarry in this town, so taking leave of our friends we departed in an easterly direction for Masjid Suleiman, the centre of the oil fields of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.

A long march over hilly ground, brought us to the foot of the Asmari hills, upon which is situated Tembi, a station of the Oil Company, lying some miles away from Masjid Suleiman and along which flows a swift stream of the same name. Dismounting from our mules and asses at Tembi, we were met by some of the employees of the Company, and from which place after replenishing our stock of water and obtaining a short rest, we proceeded on our way.

In the distance there suddenly appeared before our wondering eyes, a large number of tall tapering structures, a strange uncanny sight indeed—it seemed as though we were viewing some forest whose trees had been stripped of their leaves, and which reared their gaunt skeleton branches over the entire valley. “What is that mother?” we enquired. “It is the oil fields”, she replied; the tower-like structures being the steel well-derricks of the Company.

As we kept marching along, we noticed the hill banks literally covered for a considerable distance, with wild narcissi in bloom; the powerful and sweet scent emitted by myriads of these exquisite blossoms, perfumed the air, which otherwise would have been thick with the fumes of the petroleum which ordinarily hang over the entire valley. A little distance away and all along the hillsides, masses of poppies in large patches and of a deep red hue, grew over ground

beneath which lie the bones of many a traveller, who, in days gone by, met his doom at the hands of some robber that lurked in these lonely tracts. It reminded one of the poppies that grow in Flanders, and which bloom over the resting places of those unknown heroes who offered their precious lives as supreme sacrifices in the Great War.

Some hours later we reached the outskirts of Masjid Suleiman, from where we could see all around us, built upon the hillsides, the factory buildings, the bungalows and the workers' tenements, the Protestant and Roman Catholic chapels, the club and the hospital—the last mentioned being provided for the employees of the Company.

Instinctively knowing that their toil was coming to an end and that a long rest was in store for them, our mounts never once faltered but kept trotting the last few laps, which soon brought us into the town, where we saw a number of the townspeople standing in the roadway and eyeing us with curiosity. One of the conductors seeing my mount lagging behind, prodded it with a stick, whereupon resenting the insult, it swerved badly, sending me head over heels into the street. More ashamed than hurt, since it had taken place before strangers, I quickly remounted the creature and soon caught up the rest.

We were now at last in the midst of civilisation, where we found friends, comfortable quarters and all the amenities of a large and prosperous town.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

A short sketch of the town—The oil that issues from the soil—We tarry in this town—A welcome rest—We leave for Darkhazina—The mirage—Arrive at Abgah—Depart and arrive at Darkhazina, on the Karun—We sail down the river—A treeless waste—The mirage again—The ship of the desert—Ahwaz and Nasiri—Princess Scheherzade and Sultan Shariya—El Bassorah and Sinbad the sailor—At Mohammerah—We rest in a park—Arab girls—An English family.

Masjid Suleiman is quite a modern town, the centre of the oil industry controlled by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.

We had not proceeded far, when a man who said he was a servant of a Mr. S. a senior assistant of the Company, approached us ; his master, he said, having heard of our arrival, desired that we should meet him. Accepting the invitation, we proceeded to the residence of his employer, who cordially received us. He offered us a small cottage adjacent to his own, which he said we could occupy for as long a time as we desired to remain in this town. Some friends whom we had known in Isfahan, hearing of our arrival, also came to see us. Mother was feeling quite run down and had to take to her bed, but after being under the treatment of a physician for about a fortnight, commenced to feel better.

Masjid Suleiman is situated in a valley of the Asmari hills, and we could notice when within the town, the clean paved streets, the shops and the great oil tanks of the Company. The valuable fluid is obtained from

the extensive fields around, as it gushes out with great force from the soil below, and which is conveyed to Tembi where it is repumped to Darkhazina on the Karun river.

Here, in an obscure corner of Iran, where previously stretched a barren waste, has sprung, as by a magic wand, a great industrial undertaking, bringing prosperity to many and sustenance to thousands. After passing some pleasant and restful days at Masjid Suleiman, mother thought it time we should be ready again for the journey southwards. The physician, as also some friends, advised her to prolong her stay till such time as she should recover completely, but she was determined, weak though she was, to continue the journey without a day's delay.

I happened one morning to be sitting in the garden with my brothers, when a young man mounted on a horse, and whom we had seen before at our host's place, came up to us and said "Well children ! go and tell your parents that I shall be going to the next station of your journey, where I shall arrange for quarters for all of you." I ran and gave the message to them. Wishing our host goodbye on the following morning, we entered a mule-drawn cart which had been waiting for us. The road was full of ruts, hollows and hard clods of earth, causing the cart to proceed with difficulty. These vehicles are constructed with no springs below, so one can imagine the jolting and discomfort we were being subjected to. A level expanse stretched up to the horizon, in the midst of which appeared a large sheet of water—it



was the mirage of the desert, reflecting the blue waters of the Persian Gulf, a phenomenon which had so often deluded us from the time that we first quitted the hilly ground at Dizful. The sun which had been fiercely beating upon us throughout the day, made it all the more trying for mother, and at last, after being much battered about, we arrived at a place called Abgah, which is a pipe line station of the Oil Company, where we met the young man I have alluded to before, who took us at once to the quarters he had secured. In this way-side station, lived a few European and Armenian employees of the Company. In the evenings, this obliging friend would come across and take us out for walks in the countryside. Nothing of interest needs to be recorded of this place, where, having tarried for a couple of days, we departed at sunrise for Darkhazina, the few friends we had made at Abgah, accompanying us part of the way.

Small streams wound across our path, and the fields were green with vegetation, and after journeying over perhaps one of the worst bits of road in all our travels, we reached Darkhazina in the afternoon. This town is another important station of the Company, where powerful pumps force the crude oil received from Tembi, into the pipe lines, which convey it again through a desert tract, to Ahwaz. From this place it is again repumped to Abadan, a town near the coast, and in which are the great refineries of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The now refined oil, as also various by-products, are exported from this latter town to overseas ports.

At Darkhazina, which is situated on the Ab-i-Gerger, a tributary of the Karun, are the buildings which house the pumps, and here too are the quarters of the mechanics and the tenements of the workers. We engaged a boat to take us down the river to Ahwaz; it was such a relief moving smoothly over the water and soon we forgot that wretched road from Masjid Suleiman to the river bank. Mother however, took very ill—her face and lips had turned an ashy white; a cup of warm milk and the refreshing breeze which blew, soon however revived her.

We passed the river towns of Band-i-Kir and Weiss and the country along both banks of the Karun, was nothing but a sandy waste, destitute of vegetation, for the soil being impregnated with salt, nothing can grow on it except the camel-thorn and the tamarisk—the latter with its tiny leaves and equally tiny flowers and whose slender stems when bruised, exude sweet honey-like drops, which harden by morning. In this part of Iran we first noticed that patient creature, the camel, wending its way with slow measured strides over the treeless sands.

Sometimes upon looking out of the boat, our eyes would see what seemed like the blue waters of the Gulf, stretching far and wide. It was however only the mirage, which would again appear, only to deceive us. "See mother, there is the sea! Have we reached Mohammerah?" we would inquire of her. "No children, it is only a shadow, a picture, it is nothing" she would try to explain to us. How often indeed has it occurred that some benighted Arab mounted on his

camel and who, travelling over the burning sands of Arabia, perceives at length some inviting oasis through which flows the life-giving stream. Advancing eagerly to quench his thirst, he realises at length that it is only a delusion and a mockery.

Mohamet beautifully portrays this phantom of the desert thus :—".....like the stream upon the plain which the thirsty traveller believeth to be water, but which at last he discovereth to be nothing !" (Al Koran).

Having at last reached the twin towns of Ahwaz and Nasiri, we disembarked and after a little search at the latter place, secured suitable quarters for ourselves. I have previously stated that Ahwaz is an important town on the Karun, which receives the oil from the pipe lines that run down from Darkhazina. In days gone by, it was a city of note and much as I would like to speak of its past, space, I regret to say, again prevents me from doing so. Nasiri is the residential quarter of the European employees of the Company, and in which place we tarried for some days. Leaving the two sister towns, we boarded the paddle steamer which plies between them and Mohammerah, and after a pleasant journey lasting for about four hours, reached the latter town, passing along for the first time its noted date groves.

The town of Mohammerah is situated on the Karun, at a point where it meets the Shatt-el-Arab, and whose united waters now flow in a broad stream to the Gulf. It can trace its beginnings from the city which the Macedonian conqueror erected on its site, and

which was later enlarged by his successors, but it has now altogether lost its importance and is a miserable survival of its past.

With Basra ( El Bassorah ) to the west, these two cities preserved their renown in the days when the Arab Caliphs of Bagdad ( the most celebrated of whom being Haroun-al-Raschid, the "Commander of the Faithful" ), ruled over these lands. Much has been recounted of him by Scheherzade the Princess, in her "Tales of the 1001 Nights" and who had become the wife of Shariya the king. Having been wronged by his first queen, Sultan Shariya became a violent woman-hater and resolved therefore to wed a new princess each day and strangle her the next. The resourceful Scheherzade to appease his wrath, sought the expediency of relating to him each night one of the 1001 tales, which so soothed his ire, that he recalled his cruel commands; having thus won the esteem and love of the Sultan, she became his queen.

By the shores of this river on which these cities stood, passed also the vessels which bore Sinbad the Sailor, in quest of his many wonderful adventures. These tales possess a charm that have held the imagination of both old and young of many lands, from the time they were first narrated by Schehrezade hundreds of years ago.

The steamer anchored in midstream, where we disembarked and entered, much to our disappointment, a boat which was to take us to the town; the boats that one sees plying on these rivers, have remained unchanged through the centuries, and the

landscape and the broad flowing stream too, are the same which the conquering hosts of Persia and Greece, and the savage Mongol and Tatar hordes beheld, when they overran this historic land.

The boatmen having brought us to the landing stage, we entered Mohammerah, a town intersected by numerous water-ways, while surrounding it are the thick groves of palms which produce large quantities of excellent dates. A little distance away was a park, to which we proceeded and took our seats under the shade of a clump of trees, with the intention of looking for suitable quarters later. Having thus gained sufficient time to think out our plans, we sallied forth in search of a place; being however, unsuccessful, we returned to the park, wondering what next to do; mother was feeling weak and exhausted, so seeing a wooden seat in the grounds, she reclined upon it, resting her head on my lap. A passer-by, an Armenian gentleman, noticing us surrounded by our baggage, came up to inquire; he said he knew of a place and asking us to accompany him, took us to a building which stood within a large plot of ground, well shaded by trees, and where we engaged quarters. Being a sultry day, we passed some hours under the palms and at sunset, when a light refreshing breeze sprang up, decided to quit the spot and move into our quarters. Just before retiring to bed, I, through fidgetiness or childish curiosity, kept groping in the dark in order to get to the balcony, when all of a sudden, I thought I saw a big dark object pass quickly by.

I was so scared that I screamed out through fright and running back to the room, threw myself into my mother's arms. She thought I had swooned off, but after a while I recovered. A constable who was on duty in the street having heard my screams, came in to inquire ; mother told him to look round the building and grounds in case a thief had come in, but after a diligent search, he said he saw nobody.

I shall mention here a pleasing incident which took place on the evening of our arrival at Mohammerah. While unpacking our belongings, a chorus of girlish voices singing in a strange tongue, struck our ears, and upon looking out of the window, a pretty sight greeted our eyes, for in a field across the road a number of Arab girls, clad in their simple and becoming attire and who had come from the villages nearby, had collected together. Holding one another's hands they kept going round and round singing, dancing and laughing. The Arab girl is graceful and often very beautiful, possessing an erect and slim figure, soft features and expressive eyes and quite as lovely as her Persian sister. When it began to grow dark, the fun and frolic ceased and slowly quitting the grounds they dispersed to their homes, chattering the while like a pack of schoolgirls.

We stayed for over a fortnight in our comfortable quarters. Opposite our place was a house in which lived an English family ; the lady of the house took a great liking to us children, and one day she beckoned to me to come across to her place. When I reached the top of the stairs, the dog which was chained

in the *varandah*, seeing a stranger, barked angrily. I stood motionless through fear, whereupon she came out of the drawing room and taking me by the hand, led me into it, where I saw two other persons, one her husband and the other a lad, their son. She spoke something to them regarding me with a pleasant smile on her face. I could not understand what she said, for I did not know English at that time ; then putting her arm round me she stooped and kissed me. After being with her for a little time, she handed me a packet of sweets which I shyly accepted, and soon was back again to our quarters.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

My mother — Her illness — A vigil — Omen  
of the 'Falling Stars' — Kind friends.

Latterly there had been some improvement in mother's condition, but one morning we found her quite ill and in the afternoon she became restless. Sitting up in bed she complained, saying "Why am I so weak?" Then with tears in her eyes, she said to father "I shall never be well again—I feel I shall never see our sons in India—I am leaving the little ones in your care—look after them."

In the same building lived an Armenian family, who often came to see us. Two Persian gentlemen whose quarters were also near by, hearing of my mother's illness, came to inquire. They very kindly offered us all the assistance which we might need, advising my father at the same time to have her attended to at the hospital. He took their advice and with the assistance of these friends, she was taken there without delay. Not being allowed to accompany them, I stood in the garden in deep thoughts and then unable to suppress my feelings, gave vent to tears. The English lady who lived near by, hearing my sobs, called me to her and as I approached her, she stretched out her hand and affectionately led me to the sitting room where she kept me for some time, speaking kindly and trying to cheer me up.



At nightfall when they brought mother back, I quickly made her bed. The Armenian lady and her husband were at the time in the room, when turning to them, mother uttered these words :—"To-morrow morning .at six o'clock I shall die !" They tried to cheer her up, but she murmured again "No ! I will be dead then—I heard the doctor say so." When I had arranged the bed linen and sat beside her, those kind friends were still by her bedside, then after a while they left us and when all the rest were asleep, I lay awake oppressed by deep and anxious thoughts.

As the hours crept by, I became more and more thoughtful, and watching the rest slumbering so peacefully, envied them their sweet repose. I could see through the open window the myriads of stars that were shining in the heavens and as I gazed at them, I thought to myself that in a few short hours my mother would leave us for that land above. Then I recollected that vivid dream I had in Isfahan, just before we left that city—of those stars that fell around us in a shower, when I touched the sky with a stick.

Is that sign of the **Falling Stars** which had appeared to me in Isfahan, then going to take shape at last ? I closed my eyes and tried to sleep, so that the distressing thoughts that were passing through my mind, should not oppress me, but sleep would not come.

O sleep, O gentle sleep

Nature's soft nurse ! how have I frightened thee  
That thou no more will weigh my eyelids down.

*(Wm. Shakespeare.)*

Although I was only a little girl, I knew how serious was my mother's condition. Why ! did not the doctor say that she would die at six o'clock the next morning ? I therefore kept thinking deeply as to what would happen to us, when she would leave us for ever. Sleep then suddenly came to me and at last those distressing thoughts ceased to torment me, for now was peace and forgetfulness !

When morning broke, I woke with a start. It must have been a dream—I thought ! Sitting up in bed, I glanced at my mother sleeping beside me. She sighed a deep sigh and then all those sad and torturing thoughts came rushing back to my mind again. A little later she opened her eyes, and without any movement or word from her lips, closed them again. The lady and gentleman about whom I have spoken, came in once again to inquire. Mother used always to wear a little cross round her neck ; this she slowly and with some effort undid from the cord to which it was attached and beckoning to the lady, requested her in low accents, to give it to my father. When tea was ready and we were seated round the table, father said to me ; “Mary, here is your tea !” “Thank you father,” I replied. I was about to sip it, when something urged me to leave the table and go up to my mother's bedside. Finding her asleep, I returned to the table and had barely lifted the cup to my lips, when I heard the sound of a soft low moan. Quickly I went up to her. Her head had moved off the pillow. “Mother !” I said, gently, “let your head rest on the pillow.” She did as I desired.

Then putting her hand to her forehead, she uttered just one word, "Ah!" in a low feeble tone as though in pain. She then lay still and calm. I did not know till later, that she had left us for ever.

I sat beside father and my brothers, thoughtful and silent. Then I went up to her bedside again—she lay still, as if in sleep, with her hands crossed over her breast. Instinctively I felt she had passed away, but hoping against hope, called gently to her—"Mother! mother!" but no answer passed her lips. Then remembering what I had been told by my elders, that when the heart stops beating, it is a sign of death, I put my hand over it, but alas! its pulsations had ceased. I knew now that my mother was dead and that her spirit had gone to heaven! I had not the courage to tell my father that she was dead, so sobbing bitterly, I could only utter these words—"Father, I do not know what has happened to mother!" He replied, "Child, her sufferings are at an end! Go and tell those friends to come." I hurried to their quarters, torn with grief, which all of you dear readers have experienced in your lives, upon the death of your mother. They knew what I had come for. I stood for a few moments in the middle of the room, gazing at their faces and with my eyes filled with tears. Then I told them that my father wished them to come, but I could not utter those few but momentous words—"My mother is dead!". Sobbing my heart out, I kept only telling them to come quickly, and as they proceeded to

our quarters, I covered my face with my hands and screamed out in anguish—my little heart was breaking for I loved my mother dearly. I ran towards the stairway, not knowing what I was doing. The lady came up quickly and throwing her arms round me, tried to keep me back, but I kept struggling in her arms and crying out "Let me go to my mother!" whereupon she released me and they proceeded to our quarters; then finding myself free, I ran after them. Still sobbing, I went towards the balcony, but something kept me back. I stood gazing at the still and lifeless form of my mother, fondly hoping that she had not passed away, but was only sleeping. I watched for some slight movement from her, but she lay calm and motionless. At last I went and sat in the balcony, sometimes sobbing and sometimes silent and dazed. Those good folk stood by her bedside and after comforting my father, left us promising to return soon. Then after the lapse of some hours, they bore her across the green lawn to the cemetery. I watched her being taken away and noticed the grief my father was in—Martin was sobbing, but little Chris, too young to understand, was playing in the lawn.

When she had been laid to rest, the mourners returned and approaching father, comforted him and led us to our motherless home.

We passed that day in grief and tears, and at sunset father called me and blessed me and stroking my head, told me to take my brothers for a walk to the river.

As we kept strolling along the road, we passed a number of Arab men, women, and children who had collected in front of the shops that lined the street. Reaching the shore and sitting on the sands, we watched a steamer pass by, while a number of boats were sailing on the river. In a small boat was an old woman and as it kept pitching and tossing on the water, the poor creature screamed with fright. Two other boatmen went to her assistance and brought her safely to shore, but that did not stop her from continuing to vent her temper upon them at the top of her voice.

The next morning father with the help of some friends, moved to our new quarters which were situated in a large building not far from the last, and to which they often came to comfort us.

Some days later my younger brother Chris, seemed feverish.

I had an uncle, my mother's brother, who had arrived at Mohammerah from Isfahan, and having heard that we were in this town, came to see us ; his presence was a source of much comfort to us in our sorrow.

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## CHAPTER XX.

We take ship for India—Little Chris—Dangers—In an open boat—Arrival at Quarantina—In the burning sands—By Chris's bedside.

We were now ready to sail for Bombay and upon getting into the "bellum" or country boat, which was to take us to the steamer lying in mid-stream, my uncle noticed how weak and listless Chris had become. He had to be carried into the boat and when it had proceeded some distance, the child appeared to be getting worse. I spoke a few words to him, but getting no reply, asked my uncle to see what had happened to him. The boy was so ill that he was unable to utter a word. Finding his body cold, he thought the child had gone off into a faint. This caused me to burst into tears and ask, "Is Chris dying?" One of the Persian gentlemen who had been so good to us at Mohammerah, and who happened to be in another boat bound for the same steamer, questioned me, "Little girl, why are you crying?"—I answered "My brother wont speak." "Don't cry, he will be well soon," he said, trying to pacify me.

The boat having now come alongside the steamer, father carried Chris in his arms and cautiously kept climbing the ship's ladder. Martin and I soon followed, but we were both very afraid; meantime the boat kept pitching and tossing, but upon seeing that father had nearly reached the top, we plucked up courage and mounted the steps. Scrambling up as

best we could, Martin succeeded to reach the deck, whereas I was only half way up, and upon looking down at the water below, I was greatly alarmed and began to cry, whereupon one of the Persian gentlemen noticing my plight, came down the ladder and said to me "Why are you crying?" I replied "I cannot climb these steps—I am afraid of the water." He picked me up and carried me to the deck. Father took Chris to the cabin and Martin and I followed. After supper, I slept soundly and upon waking, it struck me that I had neglected to attend to him and my brothers. "Why was I so thoughtless?" I kept reproaching myself; and when morning dawned, I said to my father "I am so sorry I did not see to your wants"—to which he replied "It does not matter my child."

The following evening, an officer of the ship came up and told us that we would have to leave the vessel and proceed by boat to the quarantine station. I did not quite understand at the moment what it really meant for us, but it distressed us all the same, for we felt that new perils were again in store for us; it meant that we would have to proceed on a dark night in an open boat, to a place we had never heard of before, and with a dying child beside us.

There were two lady passengers, sisters, voyaging out to India and when they heard that we had to leave the ship, they advised father not to take me with him to Quarantina, but rather to leave me in their charge, promising to see me safely up to Bombay, where they would make me over to my brothers in India.

Upon hearing what they said, I crept up close to my father and pleaded not to be separated from him and my brothers, meanwhile anxiously gazing at his face to hear his reply. To my relief he said "I thank you for your kind offer, but the child would never allow herself to be parted from us." How could I ever think of letting my aged father and little brothers, go to that strange place without me! Then in the gloom of night we had to leave the ship! Chris was carried down to the boat which had been waiting for us, whilst Martin, father, and myself followed. One false step while descending the ladder, would have plunged us into the sea! As soon as we had taken our seats, the oarsmen pulled at the oars and the boat sped along. Presently loud rumbling sounds were heard on the water—it was the ship, which proudly and pitilessly steamed away, leaving us to the mercy of the wind and waves and the darkness of the night, and to reach as best we could, Quarantina, that charnel house as we later discovered it to be. Martin and I in fear complained "Father it is so dark!" "Pray children", he replied, "God will protect us." The journey occupied the whole of that night and part of the following morning. There was no moon—only the stars which shone in the heavens, afforded us light. Picture to yourselves our plight, dear readers! From the safety of the ship, our course now lay in an open boat over the dark waters of the sea! A cold wind blew which made us shiver, while my father sat silent and sad with a dying child beside him—and that ship which had cast us adrift, had sailed away and left us to



our fate ! Where could she be now ? we wondered. There must have been a swell in the sea, for as the boat rode over the waters, it kept rising and falling in an alarming manner. Being thus in a state of constant alarm, we sat huddled close to one another, hardly uttering a word throughout that night. Morning broke ! The boatmen had been rowing ceaselessly right through the night, and when at last the sun rose like a glowing ball of fire, we noticed in the distance the welcome sight of land—the boatmen exchanging encouraging words with one another, pulled lustily at the oars and soon brought us to Quarantina.

They carried us one at a time to the shore and as Martin was being taken across, he kept piteously calling out "I will fall into the sea !"—the boatmen reassured him saying, "Dont be afraid, we will take you safely across." The water here being shallow, the men were unable to bring the boat to the beach, so father too, had to wade waist-deep for a considerable distance before he could reach the shore. Owing to the weakness of his eyesight he instructed us, directly we landed, to look in his direction and that as soon as we should see him, to clap our hands—this he said, would help him to know in which direction he should have to proceed.

The absence of any kind of shelter compelled us to wait on the open sands, with the sun playing fiercely upon us. I sat beside Chris, shading him as much as I could from the scorching rays. Noticing him shivering, I asked him whether he was feeling cold, but the child never uttered a word—he only shook his little head.

Martin and I now kept anxiously watching father slowly advancing, fondly hoping that no accident would befall him. Chris was lying listless on the sands, as though the breath of life had left him and I could plainly see that he would not be spared to us long, but would soon leave us for his Home above. "O God, make Chris well", I prayed. We looked towards the sea and saw father still wading through the water and steadily approaching us. He was not far away now, so pointing my finger in his direction I remarked "See, there is father coming along!" We both ran to the edge of the water and clapping our hands called out "Father, here we are!" He now knew his way about and soon joined us. Taking Chris in his arms, he found shelter under the roof of a shed not far away, and it was such a relief to find some protection over our heads. He made a comfortable bed for us and placed Chris upon it, the rest of us cuddling up beside him. A Persian servant employed at Quarantina brought us tea on a tray. Father and Martin exhausted by the night's long journey, soon fell into deep sleep, but I remained awake, sitting by Chris and fanning him. I also wished to be beside him as long as the breath of life remained in him, for I knew that after a few short hours, I would never see any more this little brother and playmate of mine.

Then after a while, I too began to feel the effects of the night's journey, and soon overpowering sleep came to me. While under the spell of that blissful sleep, father's voice roused me. "Mary! Mary! see what has happened to Chris!" I woke with a

start and crept up to where the little boy lay. I felt his body—it was cold ! “Father”, I said, “Chris is cold !” Then after a moment’s pause I remarked again, “O Father, I think Chris is dead !” Alas ! it was too true ! the little angel through exposure and want of medical aid, had left us for ever. In grief and tears we passed that mournful day—then merciful sleep came and took our sorrows away.

When Martin and I woke at dawn, we discovered to our dismay both father and the lifeless body of our little brother, missing ! What could have happened to them ? our little heads kept wondering and puzzling. Had they both gone to heaven, leaving us behind ? Deep and anxious thoughts oppressed us. Should father not return, what would happen to us in this strange place ? O, the dread and misery of that thought ! But hark ! the sound of footsteps reached our ears ! There was no mistaking them—“He has come,” we whispered to each other. “Father, where have you been ? Where is Chris ?”, Martin inquired of him. He replied “I went to lay him to rest with God.” “But father”, I asked, “why did you not let us once look at his face before you took him away ?” He gently replied, “What is the good of it children ? God wanted him and took him away ! We again questioned him “Did anybody help you to bury him ?” “I carried him in my arms,” he replied, “and one of the servants helped me to lay him in his grave. I repeated the Lord’s Prayer over him—the child is now with God and his sufferings are at an end.”

Missing our little brother and thinking often of

our mother, we hardly cared to touch any food. A few hours later, we moved into the rest house which is provided by the authorities for such as have to be detained in quarantine. There was an old Persian gentleman who occupied a corner of the large room and he too, seemed very ill as he lay prostrate on his bed. Father who had had most of our baggage brought away and placed in the rest house, instructed us to follow up with the rest of our belongings.

I told Martin to wait in the shed till I returned, and as I kept trudging along carrying in my hands some of the light things, I could see nothing but jungle around. The path was narrow, very much broken up and with thorny bushes growing on both sides of it. With difficulty I stumbled along and succeeded somehow to reach the rest house where I found father waiting for me. Exhausted, I waited for a while before returning to fetch a few other things which had been left behind, as also to bring Martin away, who had been anxiously looking out for me. Getting alarmed at my delay, he set off on his own, hoping to find me on the road. As we approached each other I noticed him sobbing. "Why are you crying Martin?" I inquired: to which he replied with tears and sobs "I have been waiting a long time—I have walked a long way, and am tired." "But Martin, did I not tell you that I would come to fetch you? I was having a rest, for I too am tired." We sat upon a large stone that lay on the side of the path, and when that feeling of fatigue had

worn off, returned to the rest house. A few days later the boy complained of feeling ill, and had to be put to bed.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

Martin and myself—The sea—Martin's death—Mr. 'M'  
and ourselves—Crunching sounds ; was it some monster ?

With no medical aid at hand, Martin grew weaker day by day. In the cool of the evenings we would go and sit in the open to take in the fresh air ; in the distance stood a small building, while as far as the eye could reach, a forest of trees reared their tall heads. All around was silence, with neither the happy voices of children nor those of men and women, to cheer us, only the wind murmured through the branches its monotonous music. The sea was only a short distance away and the booming of the breakers resounded through our prison home. But the roaring of the waters seemed to buoy up our dropping spirits and impart an infinitesimal portion of its power into us, for what harm could ever come to us we felt, with such a mighty and constant companion beside us ? I would often gaze at that broad expanse of water in the hopes of seeing some ship pass by and I would watch those little boats sailing like white birds over its surface, hoping that one would some day come bearing glad tidings for us, but although I waited and watched, no such sign did I see, only the limitless waters rolled incessantly, murmuring to the solitudes around, the story of the ages.

Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow,

Such as creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now.

(Byron—"The Ocean.")

I would think of my mother laid to rest far away in Mohammerah—of Chris, my little brother who had just left us, and then my thoughts would wander to my schoolmates in distant Isfahan. I would think of my kind teachers, of our friends and of our home. Do they know that we are here, captives as it were, in this forsaken place? Martin grew worse day by day and frequently called for water. I asked father whether he should have so much of it. "Yes Mary, let the child have as much as he wants." Later I understood his reasons, for he knew the boy had not long to live. At supper time I partook of only a morsel and passed the hours oppressed by deep and anxious thoughts. Oh, if only some physician could come to his aid ! but that hope was only a mockery in this desolate place ! Awake, and watching over him through the weary hours, sleep at length came and brought quiet to my mind.

At night father woke me saying "Mary, get up and see what is the matter with Martin !" So weak was father's eyesight that he could never be sure of what was happening near him. I quickly went up to the child. I felt his heart but it had stopped beating ! I knelt beside him, with my hand still over his breast and looked at my father with a vacant stare, not knowing what to tell him. Then in mournful tones I said, "Father, I think Martin is dead !" and I sobbed bitterly. Seeing me in such anguish, he tried to comfort me. "My child, do not cry !" he said, "we have all to die." These words quickly checked my tears.

I must repeat again that though I was then only

a child, the sorrows I had witnessed and the varied experiences I had gone through in our travels, had caused my mind to become almost like that of a grown-up woman ; for first, was that long and difficult journey which we had performed, brimful of discomforts and perils ; then we were left motherless in Mohammerah ; next death claimed my little brother Chris and now I had to mourn for Martin. Distracted with grief, I wanted God to take me away too, so that I could be with them, my playmates and constant companions. Then the thought came to me—"No, you should not wish for death, for who then would be beside your aged father to comfort him in his grief ?"

With these sad thoughts, the hours crept by and when sleep came, it dried my tears.

Since there was no one among our own folk for miles around, no minister or relative to come to our assistance, father got one of the attendants in the rest house to help him to lay the child in his grave. He had to suffer the anguish of having to arrange everything himself for the burial of his two little sons ! He wrapped him in a new shroud and carried the lifeless body to its resting place and for the first time, unable to bear up with his sorrows any longer, the poor man broke down and wept. When I saw him thus stricken down, I could not help but shed bitter tears. I addressed him in my mind thus : "Is this your fate father, that in your old age you should suffer so, and have no one to help and comfort you, but to have to bear in your own arms your little ones to lay them in their graves ?"



Together he and that attendant, proceeded along the lonely path and reached the spot where some tall trees grew and where little Chris had been buried. I stood in front of the rest house and saw the lifeless body of Martin being borne away. After proceeding some distance, father rested on the pathway in order to recover his breath, for latterly he complained of feeling weak—he was compelled therefore to stop several times before he could reach the grave. He took the body in his arms and kneeling down, laid it in its last resting place. They covered it with earth and then kneeling again, he made the sign of the cross over it, remaining silent as if in prayer. Once again, overpowered with grief, he gave vent to tears, bemoaning his fate. He stood for a while by the side of his departed children and then slowly retraced his steps to his desolate home. The graves were not far from where I stood, so I witnessed everything that had taken place in that sorrowful hour. I repeated the Lord's Prayer as the last clods of earth were cast over his resting place.

Martin lies buried beside his little brother—during life as playmates, they were constantly together—in death they are not separated, but sleep side by side.

Rest in peace, my little brothers !—we shall meet again in those green Elysian fields, where there is neither death nor parting !

We had an old friend, a Mr. M, who lived in Bushire which is an important sea-coast town of Iran and not very far from Quarantina. Having

heard of our detention in the latter place, he wrote us a cheering letter accompanying it with a basket of fruits and vegetables. As usual the servants attached to the rest house came in at nightfall to light the lamp and tidy up the room. Late in the night I was roused from my slumbers by strange noises. It seemed to me as though some monster had come and was devouring something in the verandah. I sat up through fear, wondering what it was. Could it be some wild beast that had come from the jungles around? The door had been left open all night for ventilation. Would this creature then come in and devour us? What should I do to save ourselves? Twice I thought of getting up and shutting the door, but on each occasion fear kept me back. Gradually it dawned upon me that it might, after all, be only some stray ox that had come to feast on the vegetables. I thought I would now close my eyes—and upon doing so, soon fell off to sleep. When I woke in the morning I recollected the night's experiences and forthwith went to the verandah to see what had actually taken place. The vegetables had all been eaten up! Then I realised how silly I had been, for it was not after all some ravenous beast that had come from the jungles around, but just a harmless ox which had found its way to the rest house attracted by the odour from the vegetables.

Father was getting weaker day by day. The following evening I asked him to sit in the open, where a cool refreshing breeze was blowing; holding his hand in mine I led him to the sea-beach. Some

boats were anchored to the shore. Having reached the sands, we sat in silence thinking of those whom we had lost ; his head was bowed down, with the chin nearly resting on his breast—his face was pale and his eyes had sunk deep into their sockets. I could plainly see on his face the suffering he was going through. In a faltering voice he spoke to me these words :—"We are now all separated"—he paused for a few moments and then added "Minas and Lucas are far away in India. As for your dear mother, she lies buried in Mohammerah and we are in this lonely place. Your two little brothers' graves are constantly before my eyes. As for me, I am not long for this world and when I die I wish to be buried by the side of the little ones." He put his hand to his heart as though in pain and spoke gently again—"My little child, I would have died long ago, but I have to live for you. At nights I often feel that I am going to die, but when I realise that you will be left alone in this strange place, my strength returns to me. Had you been a boy, I would not have cared, but as you are a girl, it makes me all the more anxious for you. I keep thinking what will happen to you, should God take me away. It pains me to tell you all this, but I feel it necessary to do so in order that you should be prepared and know what to do. I shall give you some instructions later. We have, my child, all to die, remember that always and as I am old, I cannot hope to live much longer."

Oh, for those sad words which my father spoke !  
My head hung low and my little heart was bursting !

The sun had now set and the sky was a mass of purple and gold and the sea a lovely blue with not an angry wave upon it. Suddenly strains of music came from somewhere! "Listen father!" I said, "do you hear that?" "Yes" he replied, "it is one of the boatmen playing the \**kemenche*." To cheer him I asked, "Shall I sing a song?" "Yes", he replied and I sang one which mother had taught us. When I had sung the last verse he remarked "My child! that voice reminds me of the days when your mother was a girl.—she used to sing that song." As it was getting dark, I held his hand and said, "Come father, let us go home, it is getting late". As I helped him up I could feel his hand trembling and cold. He managed to slowly walk to the rest house and when supper time arrived, we did not care to taste anything, for our hearts were bleeding for our lost ones.

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\* A Persian stringed instrument.

## CHAPTER XXII.

A dream—My promise to my father—I sit by the sands—I hurry to the resthouse—A night of bitter thoughts and fears—The omen of the 'Falling Stars' fulfilled—Waiting for morning—I carry out my father's wishes—Rescued—The Good Samaritan.

I had a happy dream that night—I dreamt that the room which we occupied had suddenly become dazzlingly bright and in the midst of that light, God appeared to me surrounded by clouds, holding a Babe in His arms with little angels clustered around His feet. Golden aureoles shone over His and the Babe's head and the little Child held a spray of lillies in His hand. He stood at the foot of my bed and said to me :—"Do not weep, I shall give you back your loved ones." When I woke from sleep I was so happy and certain that I would get my mother and brothers back, that in that blissful expectation, I lay awake for some time—then sleeping and waking alternately, I waited for that happy reunion. I longed to tell my dream to my father without a moment's delay but he was in deep sleep. When he woke in the morning, I at once said to him "Father, I have had such a happy dream!—let me tell it to you."! Upon relating it to him I noticed to my disappointment, that instead of his appearing happy, it seemed rather to sadden him, and I kept wondering why. He then said to me "I too, have had a dream . . . ." and before he could continue, I interrupted him saying

"What was it father?", feeling sure that he too had received a promise that our loved ones would be restored to us. "I dreamt my child," he continued, "of your mother—she said to me that since I was infirm and old, she had taken the little ones away, and that she would look after them and for me not to mourn for them."

At sunset when he rose from his bed, I noticed him getting ready to leave the rest house. He did not utter a word but with his head bowed down, slowly bent his steps towards the graves of my brothers. I saw him stand for a brief space of time beside their graves and then kneeling down, he remained in an attitude of prayer. Then making the sign of the cross over them, he retraced his steps homewards.

Arriving at the rest house, he sat in the open in front of the building and calling me to him, made me sit beside him and spoke to me thus: "Mary, I wish to give you some instructions. Do not forget to carry them out should anything happen to me. Do not fail to do exactly as I tell you. In Bushire I have a friend, a Mr. M. about whom I have spoken before. He has his wife and two grown-up children with him. We have a number of our own folk and a church too, in that town. Should God take me away, be sure that you send through the servants this message to him at once, as also to the church people, to say that your father is dead and that you are alone and for them to come at once and take you away. Promise me that you will do as I tell

you." For a few moments I remained dazed and could not utter a word and I wanted to cry. "Answer me my child" he said, "and promise me that you will carry out my wishes, so that I may die in peace. I am compelled to tell you all this, for there is nobody except you to whom I can give this message." He paused for a moment and then added, "Do not let them throw my body into the sea, but tell them to bury me by the side of the little ones." "Father!" I said to him, "do not speak of death! It saddens me so! I will do as you wish—but you are not going to die—you will be well soon." My words brought comfort to him and he blessed me.

When night approached, I arranged his bed and pillows and helped to make him lie back comfortably. I then said my prayers, asking God to make him well and sat by his bedside, my eyes the while fixed on the lamp burning in the room, whose light seemed to cheer my drooping spirits. Then the thought flashed across my mind that mother, Chris, and Martin, had all suffered in the same way, for I had been constantly present by their side, ministering to each in their illness. Had I only been older, I kept thinking to myself, I would have been of far greater use to them, and could perhaps have helped to save their lives. Why should my father be suffering so, before my eyes? This thought overpowered me and I pressed my lips with my fingers to stop myself from crying, for it would have pained him much, had he seen me grieve. I tried to keep back my tears but was unable to do so, so burying my

face in my hands, I wept bitterly, yet softly in order not to distress him. Then I sat for some hours by his bedside, till sleep suddenly came to me. Throughout that night I slumbered and when morning broke, I rose from my bed, and distracted with gloomy thoughts stepped into the yard to look at the bushes and trees and to hear the birds chattering among the branches. I noticed some wild flowers on the bushes and thinking that if I fetched some, they would cheer him up and so make him well, I plucked as many as I could and brought them to him. The whole of that day passed with hardly a word from his lips, and meanwhile I kept constantly attending to his wants. At sunset I thought I would go and sit by the shore. Father in a low faltering voice said to me "Mary, I cannot go with you—I am very weak." "Very well Father," I said, "I shall come back soon."

Little did I know that the words he had just spoken were the last which he had uttered in life! As usual I sat in the same spot, looking wistfully at the sea and with my mind a blank. All that I was conscious of, was the incessant movement of the limitless waters, reminding me of the heavens above, where my loved ones were; and soon too, I thought, would my father's spirit fly to that land where all good people go. The solitude around me made my heart sink. I nervously kept looking sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left, hoping that some sympathetic being, hearing of our plight, would come to our aid, but no such ministering friend came to succour us. Presently one



of the servants who happened to be passing by, upon noticing my father absent, asked me where he was. I replied that he was feeling weak and wished to remain indoors. A little later, beginning to feel ill myself, I thought I would go and tell father so. I walked slowly back to our quarters and entered the room where he lay. I approached him and gently called out "Father! father!" but no answer passed his lips—it seemed as though the breath of life had left him. Realising this, I felt as though I had become a statue of stone: I called out again "Father! father!" but there was not a movement or sign of life from him! Covering my eyes with my hands, I rushed to a corner of the room and gazing at his still and lifeless form, screamed and sobbed in the bitterness of my heart with the tears streaming down my cheeks.

A voice from outside of the building questioned me through one of the open windows, "Why are you crying, little girl?" I looked and saw two of the servants standing outside, who repeated the question. I replied "I am trying to get my father to speak but he will not speak!" They reassured me saying "Don't cry, he will be well soon." "But why are you hiding things from me?" I remonstrated with them. "I know my father is dying." During the weeks that had passed of our trials and sorrows, I felt neither hunger nor thirst and had become careless, neglecting even to tidy my hair, for all my thoughts were how best to tend my loved ones in their helpless state. I then approached his bedside beseeching God to make him well, and sat beside him, dazed

and suffering the most poignant of griefs. To think that I would in a few short minutes lose my father! Oh the dread of that thought! And that I would soon become an orphan! These thoughts surged through my brain and benumbed my senses. There was no one beside me to whom I could pour out my grief. Then I thought that sleep alone, would bring me peace and forgetfulness.

It now came to my recollection again, what my father would often tell me, that should I ever be afraid feeling that some danger was threatening me, never to forget to pray to God, who would assuredly protect me, so clasping my hands together I prayed to Him, closing the while my eyes, to bring on sleep.

The Lord my pasture shall prepare.

And feed me with a shepherd's care ;

His presence shall my wants supply

And guard me with a watchful eye.

*(Addison.)*

Soon blissful sleep came, and all my sorrows vanished. I must have slumbered for some hours and when I woke, I realised again my mournful situation. My eyes however, were still heavy with sleep and a reproving thought kept passing through my mind. "What have you done?" it seemed to whisper. "You have been thoughtless again! You have not been attending to your father! Get up and go to him!" Rousing myself I went to his bedside, troubled in mind and fearing that he may have passed away while I lay asleep, for never once did he call out to me throughout the night. Alas! it

was too true ! for I found him cold !—I muttered to myself, "Father is dead !" Then dear reader, the thought came to me vividly, the awful thought that had latterly been torturing me. "You are an orphan now ! You are all alone in this strange place ! You have no one beside you ! What is going to happen to you ?" Feeling sure that he had passed away, I lifted the coverlet to arrange it over him. In doing so, my hand fell into his and he gently held it ! Oh, the happy thought, to know that he still lived ! Perhaps he will be well again ! I fondly hoped. "Father, let my hand go !" I said to him, "it's me, Mary,—I wish to cover you up !". He released his hold and I arranged the coverlet over him. I understood the reason why he held my hand, for he must have felt a great relief and comfort to know that his little daughter was safe beside him—his deep concern for my welfare being constantly in his mind. Gazing at him, I knew that in a little while he would pass away ; I knew, because I had already experienced in those few and memorable weeks, the passing away of my three loved ones. Overpowered with grief, I gave vent to tears when I realised that he had breathed his last.

Dear readers, that omen of the **Falling Stars** had now at last been fulfilled !

As I sat beside him, I longed for morning to break, for then only would that awful stillness which hovered round the room, pass away. The sun God's own light, the trees, the birds, and perchance some ministering friend to whom I could tell that my father was

dead, would on the morrow, I fondly hoped, bring relief to my distracted mind..

Once again I remembered what I had been told in my early childhood days, that when the cock crew at early dawn, night had passed, so I sat waiting anxiously for morning to break. I kept myself awake, so that I should not miss hearing those comforting notes. Then at long last, those clear shrill notes penetrated through the building. I heaved a sigh of relief, for I knew now that the solitude of night had passed. Then again I kept reasoning within myself that it would take some hours before the sun appeared ; therefore to obtain relief from those oppressive thoughts, I once again said my prayers and sought repose in sleep. And when the sun-beams struck the window of that death-chamber, I awoke, and with a heavy heart rose from my bed and cast an anxious look at the lifeless form of my gentle and beloved father, but his spirit had long since flown to heaven.

Many a lesson comes to mortal men, through sight of  
what befalleth : yet no man, till the day of sight, can  
divine in things to come, how he himself shall fare !”

*(“The Ajax”—tragedy by Sophocles—*

*E.D. A. Morshead’s translation.)*

Then the thought repeatedly came to me—“your father is dead—and you are alone ! he is dead and you are alone !” I did not know which way to turn and stood irresolute—I put my hands to my head and ran my fingers through my hair and in grief went to a corner of the room where my sobs and

lamentations brought inquirers to the window. The same voices again questioned me, "Why are you crying?" I looked in the direction of the opening and saw the servants attached to the building standing near the window. I answered, "My father is dead!" whereupon they came up to his bedside and after standing beside it for a while, remarked to each other "Yes, he is dead."

I did not forget the instructions I had received from my parent and the promise I had made him, so still sobbing I addressed them in these words:—"Go to Bushire and tell the church people there as also Mr. M., that my father is dead and that I am alone here—tell them to come at once and take me away—before my father died, he told me to send you to Bushire immediately, with this message."

Without delay they journeyed to that town. The whole of the previous night and throughout the following day, I remained beside the lifeless form of my father, with no sister, brother or friend to comfort me and assuage my grief. The stillness of death was in that room and during my vigil watching my beloved father sleeping his last sleep I realised fully what it was to be alone in the world and the meaning of those words—"you are an orphan now!" With no one beside me, I repeat again, to whom I could pour out my grief, and no one to protect me from the dangers which surrounded me, all I could do was to pray to our Comforter in heaven.

Gentle Jesus meek and mild,  
Look upon a little child !  
Pity my simplicity  
And suffer me to come to Thee !

I kept restlessly pacing from his bedside to the door of the room. I could hear the crows as also a solitary raven cawing in the yard, and I kept watching them as they flew from place to place. I could see some kites circling in the air, while a couple of sparrows twittered near the door ; they did not fear me ; they seemed to be like two little friends sent to keep me company ; for hours I watched them flying in and out of the verandah. I then sat by the bedside of my father, gazing at the bushes that grew near the door and I looked out for the little birds and winged insects which at times alighted on the branches ; I felt they were all companions to me in my loneliness.

Suddenly the presence of the two servants who had returned from Bushire, roused me from my stupor. They asked me to leave the room for a while and upon my inquiring the reason, said they wished to take my father's remains away. I then remembered the promise I had made to my parent that he would be laid to rest beside my little brothers, so, fearing that they were not going to observe his last wishes, I refused to quit his side. As I was obdurate, they again left for Bushire to inform our friends there and to obtain fresh instructions. I then once again sat by my father's bedside, wondering why I alone, should have been saved whilst the rest of my loved ones had been taken away. Were they not as

deserving as myself to have been spared the sufferings which they had endured?

The thought then struck me that I too, had to follow them. It seemed so natural that it should be so. I therefore drew myself close to where he lay and resting my head on his bed and with my eyes closed, waited for my turn to die.

In this position I remained quiet and still, receiving in the midst of that solitude some sort of vague comfort and consolation in the presence of my poor father's still form, lifeless though it was! I shed no more tears for I was dead to everything around me and unconcerned about myself! All sense of fear and anxiety as to what was going to happen to me, had also left me. I do not know how long I remained in this state. The day had passed and the sun was now setting.

Suddenly I was roused by a man's powerful voice addressing me: "Girlie! girlie!" It did not startle me. I looked up and saw the kindly face of a man before me. He stood near the door. "I have been sent by the church at Bushire to look after you! come with me," he said.

In the dazed condition I was in, I had altogether forgotten that I had carried out my father's wishes in having sent the message to Bushire through the servants. Then recollecting that I had done so, I questioned him; "Who are you and where do you want me to go?" "I am the sexton of the church at Bushire", he replied—"I have been sent to look after you and to bring you away. We shall have

to move to some other place meantime." "To which place?" I inquired. "There!" he said, pointing to a white house situated some distance away. "Do you see that house?" he asked. Standing on my tiptoes, I saw through the window the building he had pointed out. "Yes!" I answered. He then approached my father's bedside and standing in silence prayed a while. Opening a trunk from among our baggage, he took out some papers and after putting me a few questions, replaced them in it. "Now little girl," he said "go to that white house and wait for me. I shall follow soon." Reluctantly I made ready to leave the rest house, glancing several times at the spot where my father lay. I wanted to ask regarding his burial, but could not bring myself to speak about it, so with a sad heart I quitted that place to which I was never to return, and took to the pathway which led to our new quarters.

" . . . . too well the loathed couches of this woeful home  
could tell how oft I bewail mine ill-fated sire!"

(*"The Electra"* of Sophocles—Morshead's translation)

On my left was the sea—the graves of my brothers were to my right and as I slowly wended my way along, I kept thinking only of the wish my father had expressed to be laid to rest beside his little ones. Soon I reached the house and sat on the steps of the verandah gazing wistfully at the sea.

"Take cheer, take cheer, O child! Zeus (God) is yet lord in  
heaven, and he watcheth all things and ruleth in power."

(*The Chorus in "the Electra"*—Morshead's translation.)



After a while my guardian arrived. He was kind and looked after me and I used to address him as "Uncle." After the lapse of more than ten years, I happened to meet this Good Samaritan in India, and he narrated to me the full story of my rescue as also of other incidents that had taken place, of which I had either no knowledge at all or only a dim and hazy notion. He told me that when our folk at Bushire had come to know of my plight at Quarantina, they tried to persuade a Persian woman to proceed to that place in order to bring me away, promising to reward her handsomely for her services, but she declined their offer, explaining that she feared to go to a place where so much sickness raged. They next sent for the sexton, who as I have already mentioned, was serving in the church at Bushire, and asked him to go to Quarantina; he too expressed his unwillingness for he was, he said, a poor man and the only bread winner in his family and he feared that should the pestilence carry him off, his wife and children would be left unprovided for; but they prevailed upon him whereupon the brave man agreed to face the dangers and bring me away.

The quarantine regulations compelled us to stay a week longer at this place, after which permission was granted us to depart for Bushire. In the evenings my guardian would take me to the sea-shore, where I would collect those pretty shells that lay on the sands. One day I asked him where my father had been buried. He replied "I laid him beside the little boys—I said prayers over his grave—he is with God." Often

to cheer me, he would relate interesting little stories. A child's grief soon passes away, for forgetting my sorrows I would sing and dance which helped to cheer him too. I was not permitted to wear my own clothing nor take any away with me, so a parcel containing a new outfit was sent for me from Bushire.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

We depart from Quarantina—Arrival at Bushire  
—At the clergyman's house—Mr. 'M' and his  
family—Mr. 'T', Yeranak & Owen—Preparing  
to leave for India—The buffeting makes me sick.

The day of our departure having arrived, we were ready to leave for Bushire. My guardian had to wade some distance in the water, before he could reach the boat which had been waiting for us. Shortly after leaving Quarantina, that "land of darkness and of the shadow of death" and which now gradually disappeared from view, the boat brought us once again to the waters of the Persian Gulf. Presently a little white skiff appeared and when it came beside ours, one of the occupants stepped out of it and entered our boat; I kept wondering who he was, but when he examined my eyelids and put a few questions to my guardian, I knew it was the physician.

How very different was this, my return journey, from that which my father, brothers and myself had made on that memorable night when we had to leave that gallant ship, to be rowed over the dark waters for Quarantina! We were then a family of four, but now the only one left of that number was myself, to tell the story which I recount in these pages.

Upon arriving at Bushire, a number of our folk met us at the beach. They had engaged a boat with the object of meeting us half way, but having

inadvertently taken a different route, had missed us altogether—accordingly they returned to the town and waited at the landing stage for our arrival. Upon meeting them we proceeded together to the church, where I was taken to the clergyman's house. The old gentleman who was having his supper, received me kindly and made me sit beside him and asked me to share with him his meal. I shyly replied "No thank you, father." Presently sounds of footsteps were heard, when an elderly individual appeared—it was Mr. M., my parents' friend. I stood up when he entered the room and after the usual greetings between those that had assembled had taken place, he came up to me and asked me my name. I answered him and stretched out my hand to shake hands with him—whereupon he laughingly patted me on the head. Then wishing his friends "Good night" and telling me to follow, he made ready to depart, the reverend gentleman blessing me, as we left his quarters. A servant who was present, as also "uncle" the sexton, accompanied us to the gate of Mr. M's house. I was taken upstairs into the sitting room in which were Mr. M's wife, their daughter Yeranak and their son Owen, the first two greeting me affectionately.

The sorrows and dangers which I had been through, drew much sympathy from our folk at Bushire. After putting me a few questions they wanted me to have supper with them, but I timidly said "No thank you." "Now like a good girl" said Yeranak "come and have something with us"—upon which I was taken to the

dining room and when supper was over, she and Owen went to the sitting room, taking me along with them, while Mr. and Mrs. M. joined us later. While listening to the music that was being played on the gramophone, my eyes began to fill with tears, for it brought to my mind my parents and little brothers. Noticing my grief they tried to cheer me up and after a time we retired for the night, my bed being placed beside Yeranak's. The "M's" were all kindness to me and kept me happy. There was a little girl named Queenie who lived with her parents opposite our place—she used to come over to play with me and we would make frocks for our dolls or pass the day in play. The "M's" had some friends over to an evening party and among the guests was a tall and very old gentleman, known as Mr. Tigran, a wealthy merchant of Bushire; but fate had been unkind to him for he was totally blind, compelling him to have an attendant constantly by his side. Mr. M. was his business manager and Mr. Tigran who was a bachelor, lived all alone in his well appointed quarters attended by numerous servants. He owned estates in Bushire and all that wealth could procure, he possessed, but no wife or children to brighten his home and although he would have given a king's ransom to get his eyesight back, that boon was denied him.

Having come to know of the sorrows I had undergone and that I had been left alone and unprotected in Quarantina, it touched his heart and he resolved to leave no stone unturned to rescue me; when I was brought to Bushire he instructed Mr. M. to

look after me and to bring me up as though I were one of the family. Sometimes he would come over and take Yeranak, Owen and myself out for drives in the victoria, or we would visit occasionally his villa, where we wandered about to our heart's content, in its pleasant grounds. It was a long drive and when the victoria pulled up at the gate, about a dozen dogs rushed out to greet their master, barking and pawing at him and keeping up such a chorus of noise and confusion, that it positively alarmed me. Yeranak, Owen and myself wandered about the grounds and after plucking flowers were ready to return home. We took our seats in the carriage while Mr. T. mounted on a horse and with a servant holding the bridle, followed behind. Having had a pleasant afternoon we thought it time we should be back home before it grew dark. Often friends would invite us to tea or dinner parties and in return we would entertain them at our place. In this manner the days passed by pleasantly, my education meanwhile not being neglected, for during the day I had to sit to my tasks.

Meanwhile my brothers in India who had come to know of the sad story of our lives, were also written to by the "M's", who informed them that I was staying with them and that everything was being done for my well-being and happiness. They wrote back thanking my guardians for all their kindness but expressed their desire that I should journey out to India and be with them, since I was now the only link that remained of their family circle in Iran.

Accordingly I was told of my brothers' wishes and although I was now happy with these kind friends, Yeranak especially having come to take a great liking to me, yet I thought it was only right and natural that I should be with my brothers. The "M's" would sometimes question me : "Mary, do you wish to be with us or with your brothers ?" It was a difficult question to answer, but I would reply "I wish to be with my brothers." A few weeks before my departure we happened to be in the drawing room, when Mr. M. said to me, "In a few weeks, Mary, you will be with your brothers." This remark immediatly brought to my mind those whom I had lost, and the thought came to me that when I would meet my brothers in India they would surely ask me to relate the tragic story of our lives. This caused my eyes to fill with tears. "Why are you in tears Mary ?" they asked ; "Because" I replied "I shall be meeting them without my parents and little brothers."

Arrangements were meanwhile made for my voyage to India. The clergyman of the church in Calcutta was written to and he consented to act as my guardian as soon as I should arrive in that city. Mr. Tigran who had taken charge of the money and letters of credit which were with my parents at the time of their death, sent them to the reverend gentleman in India for the purpose of paying for my immediate needs as also for my education. Meanwhile, an elderly gentleman, whom I shall call Mr. A., together with his wife, their two grown-up daughters and some children had just arrived at Bushire from Shiraz ; they

were sailing for India and it was arranged that they should take charge of me and make me over to my guardian the clergyman, as soon as we should arrive in Calcutta.

A day before we sailed the "M's" had friends over to tea and Mr. Tigran whom I used to address as "Grandpa", was also present. Yeranak entertained the company with songs, playing her own accompaniment and her fine rich voice was the subject of comment by all. She had a sweet face, large brown eyes and a fine head of hair. They made me sing too, and I sang a couple of my school songs ; then after a few parlour games and a little dancing, the company broke up.

At last the morning of my departure arrived ; in the afternoon Yeranak, Owen, their parents and a few friends took me to the wharf, where we found the ship moored some distance away and when the "M's" kissed me "goodbye", I could see the sad look on Yeranak's face. A Persian servant of the "A's" carried his master's children to the boat which took us to the ship and when my turn came to be carried to it, the man overbalanced himself and both he and I fell into the hollow of the boat ; "Uncle" and Owen forthwith jumped into it and picking me up asked me if I was hurt. Before I could reply, they took the servant to task for his negligence. "Please uncle," I said "don't be angry with him, it is not his fault." We had now reached the ship, but as there were several other craft, crowded with passengers, that had arrived earlier, we had to wait our



turn to mount the ladder. Meanwhile the disturbed state of the water caused us to be pitched and tossed about, to the great alarm of one of the ladies seated in our boat. Holding a Bible in her hand, she appealed to us saying, "Pray for our safety, children! God hears the prayers of little ones." Handing me the Bible she questioned me, "Do you know what this book is?" I nodded my head—whereupon she said "Take it and pray." The buffeting we had been subjected to made me quite sick, but I managed however to scramble up the ladder and soon reached deck. Still feeling sick, I thought I would go and rest in one of the cabins. I therefore made straight for it and threw myself on to the bunk. Suddenly to my surprise a short, stout man appeared before the door, holding two bottles of what may have been beer, in his hands. He only noticed my presence when he had stepped half way into the cabin and for a moment stood stock still staring at me in surprise—then, with an amused smile on his face, turned and walked away, still holding the two bottles in his hands. As soon as I felt better I joined the "A's" who were still on deck and they took me to the cabin reserved for ourselves. In a little while the ship steamed away on her voyage to India. Farewell to you my parents and little brothers and farewell also to you my dear friends who had been so kind to me!

So loathe we part from all we love,  
From all the links that bind us,  
So turn our hearts as on we rove  
To those we've left behind us. (Thomas Moore.)

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

I leave Iran and am on the high seas—I set foot in India—Arrival in Calcutta—Am seriously ill—Am a patient in a hospital—A strange reunion—Happenings at the hospital—Depart for our home—My return to Calcutta.

We had now left Iran far behind and were on the high seas, the waters of which were agitated by the winds which blew with such force that I could hardly keep my balance.

As far as the eye could reach, the billows rose and fell, roaring incessantly as if resentful of our presence in their forbidden waters. In our journey through Iran we at times traversed arid treeless tracts with no human habitations around; here on the broad expanse of the sea, no life was to be seen except at times a solitary gull or the silvery flying fish leaping out of the waters.

Our days used to pass by pleasantly in quiet conversation, in needlework, or, on my part, in going through my school lessons. We would go round the ship descending the steep ladders and watch the great engines working ceaselessly. What a forest of rods and shafts that kept bobbing up and down in the engine room with not a moment's rest! And then the great wheel! while, low down, the firemen with blackened bodies, kept shovelling coal into the big blazing furnaces.

In about a week, we sighted Bombay and after an

hour, the ship reached that great city of Hindusthan, the land that my mother had set her heart upon to make our home in, but which the Will of Providence had ordained she should never see. Disembarking, I, the one surviving member of that benighted family, set foot on its soil. We drove in a victoria to an hotel and after a couple of day's stay in the city, boarded the train for Calcutta. I marvelled at the speed with which she tore along, the powerful locomotive racing madly through the broad, limitless plains. How very different, it struck me, was the mad haste with which she careered along, compared with the slow tramp, tramp, of the caravan mules of Iran. We passed innumerable villages and halted at many roadside stations. I was not feeling too well right through the journey and at last after two days of continuous travelling, arrived at sunrise in Calcutta, the end of my long journey. Upon stepping out of the compartment, I felt my head swinging and everything appeared dark before me. I was in a burning fever and could hardly stand. I had, however, sufficient presence of mind to sit on one of the trunks which was lying on the platform, and after a short while began to feel better. We stepped into a carriage which took us to an hotel, and in the evening the "A's" took me to the church, where two of the clergymen received us and from where I was taken to a boarding establishment. I understood from the conversation which took place between them and the landlady, that they wanted her to take me in as a boarder ; realising this, I clutched at my guardian's robe and in tears, pleaded not to be left behind but to be allowed to remain with him. Finding me in burning

fever, she advised the clergymen to take me to hospital without delay, which they wisely did. I was admitted as a patient and on being put to bed swooned off, and when I revived I saw a nurse by my bedside ; I kept looking out for my guardian, the reverend father, but he had gone away. Some days later when I had recovered somewhat, two young men, visitors, came in to see me. I kept wondering who they were for I felt certain I had never seen them before—after a time, one of them asked me, “Do you know who we are, Mary ?” I could only feebly reply “No.” Upon which he said, “We are your brothers, Lucas and Minas—I am Lucas and that is Minas—do you recognise us now ?” I remained silent and puzzled, yet at the same time felt that they might after all be my brothers, of whom so much had been spoken and whom I had now at last seen ! I was a babe when Minas left Isfahan for India, and only two and a half years old when Lucas followed him. They both kissed me and sat for a long while beside my bed and whenever they put me a question I could only answer them with a “Yes” or “No”, for I was still very weak. I remained quiet in bed staring at them, and wondering whether they were really my brothers ! Are these then those brothers of mine, I kept thinking to myself, who so constantly filled the thoughts of my parents ? Prompted by childish curiosity, I asked them “How did you know I was here ?” They replied that they had received a telegram from my guardian and so had hurried down at once. A few days later, Lucas being under the belief that I was well enough to leave hospital,

went up-country to get everything ready for me in my new home with them. Minas meanwhile, asked the physician whether I could travel up, but was told that it was not advisable I should do so. He too, had to rejoin his work, so coming up to my bed said to me "Mary, I have to leave Calcutta tonight; cheer up, you will soon be well." I was improving steadily and a few days later Lucas returned and when he came to see me, I noticed his hand bandaged up. He had been admitted as a patient into this hospital as he had badly injured his hand by splinters of broken glass. I could not speak English at that time and therefore was unable to understand what the nurses said to me. The Colonel of the hospital would come up to my bed every morning and greet me with these words:—"Well, rosy cheeks!"—I would wonder what he said—I repeated the words to myself and got them by heart and when Lucas next came in, I asked him what they meant, which he explained. The excellent climate of Iran had evidently left its impress upon my cheeks.

I had now sufficiently recovered and was permitted to leave my bed and use the wheeled chair which was a source of great delight to me. I happened one day to be wheeling myself about in the verandah, when the nurse on duty took my temperature; she discovered that I had come in again for fever, whereupon I was put back to bed. I could not understand the reason, so thinking it was merely a whim on her part, got out of bed and ran to the verandah. She spied me there and taking me up in her arms put me back

to bed, warning me not to leave it. Later, they placed me in another part of the ward ; my brother Lucas happened, as usual, to come in, but finding some other patient occupying the bed I had before, received quite a shock. On inquiring, the nurse pointed out to him my new place—he could not help telling me later that for a moment he felt quite alarmed and wondered what had happened to me. I had a relapse and for a time my condition became worse than what it had been before. One evening after I had recovered from this second attack, he came and sat beside me and finding I had gained sufficient strength said to me “Mary, if you are able, tell me all about our parents and little brothers, but if it should sadden you, do not speak about it.” I replied that I would tell him all that had happened. As I began to narrate the story of my mother’s illness and of her last hours, all the bitterness of the past came back to me. I could not continue recounting that tragic event, upon which he calmed me and commenced telling me little stories which soon dispelled my tears.

One of the nurses happened one day to remark to him “Why is your sister so small, Mr. Gregory ?” He replied : “She may be small nurse, but she tended her parents and two little brothers to the very last.”

A lady visitor, a Mrs. T., came one afternoon to the ward and approaching my bed, said something to me. Finding I could not understand what she said, she wrote a few lines on a piece of paper and handed it to me. When Lucas came in next

I gave him the note and asked him to tell me what she had written ; he explained that she desired to see me at her place as soon as I should be well enough to obtain my discharge. I was very happy throughout the time of my illness ; the nurses grew exceedingly fond of me and would take me up in their arms and walk about the ward and caress me, and when I had to leave the hospital, they said to my brother that they were very sorry indeed to lose their little friend. At last I was well enough to undertake the journey. We did not forget our promise to call on Mrs. T.—she seemed very interested in me and expressed her regret upon being told that I was leaving Calcutta for good. Soon we boarded the train for our up-country home and after a quick run, arrived at our destination. Upon approaching our cottage, I noticed what a pretty little place it was—everything was neat and trim ; it had a little garden in front with a couple of seats nestling under some tall shrubs ; a creeper which at nightfall scented the air, covered the front of the verandah ; good old Rover barked joyously as he spied us. Our evenings were often bright and happy for friends would come and the hours would pass by pleasantly. The long weary hours of the day however, added to my loneliness, for I had to remain alone at home during the absence of my brothers at work. Being without the companionship of girls of my age, it became so trying for me that my health got affected, which compelled my brothers to send me down to Calcutta. Accordingly they accompanied me in the journey down and upon our arrival in Calcutta I was

taken to my guardian the reverend gentleman, about whom I have spoken before. He placed me in a boarding establishment where I stayed for about a couple of months. When Mrs. T. was told that I was in Calcutta, she came round one morning to see me and would frequently send her car to bring me over to her place keeping me all day with her. I remember on one occasion whilst she was having lunch, I asked her how her husband was ; she seemed amused and at the same time pleased at my sensible question and smilingly replied "He is quite well, thank you." The reverend gentlemen would come occasionally to enquire about me. One evening Mr. "M" who was, if my readers will remember, my guardian at Bushire, came in to see us. His visit to Calcutta was, he said, for the purpose of meeting his sister and directly he saw me, remarked how much I had grown. It was his intention, he said, to stay in this city for just a few days, before returning to Iran.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

Am put to school—My school days—Progress in my studies—Am a pupil in a convent—Stage plays—Mother Medarda, the Lady Superioress—Mr. 'M' arrives in Calcutta—Inquires about his "little daughter"—Yeranak.

Two months having passed it was decided that I should be sent as a pupil to "La Martiniere" in Calcutta and the first thing they made me do in the form into which I had been admitted, was to read a lesson from the reader. I held the book in my hands bewildered and distressed, for I knew nothing of English, not even the alphabet. Noticing the anxious look on my face, the teacher inquired the reason and finding I could not not even spell a word, told a girl to take me to another class. As I was being led out of the room, I realised that I was being sent to a lower form ; I followed her down the passage thoroughly ashamed of myself. "What is the matter" she inquired. I told her the reason, whereupon she gave me heart and I soon recovered from the dejection I had fallen into.

Upon entering the new classroom, my companion explained matters to the teacher, who pointed out to me my desk and handed me a small primer from which I had to learn my alphabet ; a few days later I found I had mastered it and after plodding for some weeks, was able to form letters, spell words and even to speak a little English. One day she remarked to the class that she was very pleased at the progress

I had made. Being of a quiet disposition and imbued with a deep sense of obedience towards my superiors, I found I had made myself much liked by my teachers and schoolmates. In about eight months I was able to speak English fairly well. I may mention too the fact and with no desire of self-praise, that nature has bestowed upon me the gift of a voice of much power and compass. My schoolmates would get together and coax me to sing, but they had also another object in view and that was to get some amusement at my expense, for they giggled and nudged one another, whenever I happened to pronounce a word incorrectly ; but that did not disconcert me for I felt it was all in the game and I would laugh heartily whenever they pointed out to me the ridiculousness of my pronunciation. The school would sometimes get up concerts and plays which were open to the public. This set me a-thinking and I resolved to give my companions a surprise by staging a play of my own fancy with songs and recitations in between. I told two of my friends of my plan and they fell in with it, so for a couple of days we secretly rehearsed the programme ; there were neither dialogues nor a plot of any kind, but plot or no plot, we were determined to stage it. In the midst of our preparations, the secret leaked out and the teacher on duty wished to know whether it was true. Replying in the affirmative we found to our pleasant surprise, that far from obstructing us, she seemed rather to encourage the idea. "Are you quite ready, Mary?" "Yes, Miss 'X'" I replied. Forthwith she rang a

handbell, which brought all the girls together from the four corners of the playground. We started the performance going through all the stage-craft that we had picked up. My turn having come to sing, I held an open book in my hands and sang for all I was worth, my voice ringing through the corridors of the building; but my pronunciation of some of the words was incorrect and strange. Upon the so-called entertainment coming to a close, Miss 'X' questioned me. "Mary, what language was that in which you sang?" "It was English Miss, 'X'" I replied. "Really!" she remarked in surprise, "Well I never! I could not catch a single word!" It was after all, only a poem from our reader to which I put my own tune and upon pointing it out to her, she could only remark "Well, Mary!" and burst out laughing.

Having made good progress in my class, I was put after the yearly examinations were over, to a higher form and in this class too, I did very well, standing first in French. I had on two occasions to pass the vacations in school and the sight of my companions getting ready to go away, filled me with dejection. A few days later, however, I found myself, just as happy as ever in the company of those, who, like myself, had to stay behind, for we passed the time in games, swimming, music and dancing and there were occasions too, when the teachers took us for a turn in the Zoo or to the cinema and on Sundays we never missed going to church. And at the reopening of classes we set to work in earnest.

One afternoon I was sent for by the Lady Principal, who told me that my brother desired to withdraw me from school at the end of the term. When the day arrived for me to leave "La Martiniere", he came and took me away; so "Goodbye", dear "Martiniere"! where I had passed two happy years of my life. Meanwhile my elder brother had got married and I accompanied the newly-wedded couple to our up-country home. It was now arranged that I should continue my studies at the Convent of St. Joseph at Bankipore where the Superioress, Mother Medarda, gave us an interview and I was taken in as a pupil and sent to my classroom. It is a well known institution situated in the town of Bankipore, a short distance away from the city of Patna, and to which pupils come from distant towns in India.

The sisters belong to a German order, noted for its proficiency in music and needlework. Besides the usual class rooms, there are the dormitory, the refectory and the music rooms, with the infirmary a little distance away. A separate building within the schoolgrounds is set apart for the education of orphan girls of Indian parentage. In front of the refectory is a garden, with a winding path leading to the main building and from which extends another garden.

At times the teachers would get up entertainments, and on one occasion a concert, followed by a Grecian play, was staged, in which twelve pupils took part, six representing ladies of high degree and six their maids. I was chosen as one of the latter. My

schoolmates seemed discontented at my having been included in their number, for they felt very sure I would spoil the play. For days together they kept talking about me to one another, sometimes even telling me up to my face their fears and misgivings. Naturally I began to believe what they said, for I felt that they knew, regarding these matters, better than myself. The rehearsals took place always after breakfast and then would come the big rehearsal, in which we had to don our stage costumes and which took place in the presence of Mother Medarda, the sisters and lay teachers of the convent, as also of the professors and pupils of St. Michael's College at Bankipore. I could hardly believe it when told by my schoolmates after the performance was over, that I had acted the best. One morning instead of being present at a rehearsal which was to take place in the music room, I forgetfully stayed behind in the playground, when suddenly recollecting that I had to be present, hurriedly made my way to the room and was just about to enter it, when the door opened and a girl rushed out. As she saw me she cried out, "Mary, be quick, why are you late? Do you know, Sister Engelbert says you acted the best!" I quickly entered the room and to my embarrassment, found they had all been waiting for me. At the next rehearsal I happened to be standing in the verandah, my mind wool-gathering, when the notes of the piano roused me. I rushed across the room and bounded on to the stage, whereupon Sister Engelbert and the girls stared in surprise, the former rebuking me

in these words—"I suppose you will do exactly the same thing in this evening's performance."

The stage was decorated with leaves and flowers, while garlands and wreaths were made up from the blossoms of the garden. The costumes looked pretty, the six Grecian maids being dressed in flowing white robes with wide sleeves, trimmed with silver tinsel and with girdles of flowers encircling their waists, and in their hands they held garlands of roses. The Grecian ladies on whom we attended wore similar robes with silver bands in their hair and girdles of tinsel round their waists—they too held rose-garlands in their hands.

When evening drew near all was bustle and excitement, for the hour of the public performance had arrived. The residents and officials of Bankipore streamed into the hall, which was soon packed to overflowing. The first part of the programme was the concert and next the Grecian play, which latter was well gone through, receiving much praise from the audience. Next we appeared dressed as various woodland birds, some representing gay-plumaged parrots and others as robins, larks and magpies—there was a nightingale and a pretty butterfly too. From the garden the trunk of a tree with its branches partially lopped off, was fixed to the stage and made to look like a woodland-glade. We sat perched on the branches and a parrot strutted about, reciting. The scene opened with the nightingale singing, as she sat alone on the top-most branch and it was followed by the warblings of other birds. This pretty woodland scene

brought the entertainment to a close. A few days later I happened to be in the corridor humming a tune, when Sister Engelbert passed by. I wished her "Good evening." "Good evening, Mary", she replied and with a smile on her face added "Do you know that you acted the best." I smiled shyly, upon which she remarked again, "Yes, Mother Medarda told me so." I noticed the pleasure on her face, for she felt she had been rewarded for the pains she had taken in coaching us up for the performance.

In such manner then, did my schooldays pass and meanwhile I made fair progress in English. During my stay in Calcutta I was told of an incident that had taken place at the house of one of our friends in that city. Mr. M. of Bushire who had occasion to visit Calcutta, happened to be present at the gathering and upon being shown a photograph of a wedding group in which I was one of the flower girls, recognised me at once. "Why, that is my little daughter Mary" he exclaimed. "Where is she?" shortly after, he left India and I never saw the good old man any more. As for Yeranak his daughter, the girl with those gentle ways and sweet voice, she was, when I first saw her, engaged to be married and shortly after, the wedding took place—but she did not live long, for she was suddenly cut off in the bloom of her youth.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

A suitor for my hand—Wedding bells—I journey to my new home—Church of St. John—First impressions of the place.

After I had passed a few days of my vacation in Calcutta, I was withdrawn from school, thus bringing the happy time I had spent there to a close. I was now fifteen years old and stayed in my brother's house where I passed my time in quiet study, in needlework and in assisting in household duties. Being still a girl and only just out of school and having lost too, those priceless blessings, a mother's guidance and love, I found life pretty hard. I would often feel lost and think anxiously about my future especially as I was ignorant of the ways of the world. Often these thoughts kept me awake and one night as I sat in the balcony, gazing at the brightly lit street and watching the busy traffic, I looked up to the heavens and prayed to God for guidance. I realised fully too, how different things would have been had my parents lived. One evening I happened to be in the sitting room reading, when a knock was heard at the door—it was a young man, a stranger, who had come to see my brother and as I was told later, with the object of obtaining my hand in marriage. I did not know what answer to give, for I was too young then to think of matrimony, besides I had never seen my suitor before. He was therefore told to wait for a time till I was able to make up my mind. Then after giving the matter much thought, I decided



to throw in my lot with him. We got engaged and the marriage was fixed for a fortnight hence; meanwhile, all necessary arrangements for the wedding had been taken in hand. On the eve of my marriage when I retired to sleep, I felt anxious and troubled and lay awake for hours, thinking of the new life that was soon to begin for me.

At last the day arrived and at dawn I woke with a start, for I realised that in a few short hours I would be a married woman. They flew fast and only a few minutes now remained—I was ready dressed, in my bridal attire and attended by two flower girls. With fluttering heart, I stepped into the car accompanied by my brother who had to give me away and upon our arrival at the church door, I walked up to the altar where I found my prospective husband waiting for me. The wedding bells peeled out their joyous notes and when the ceremony was over, my friends who had gathered around, offered me their warmest congratulations.

Hear the mellow wedding bells

Golden bells !

What a world of happiness their harmony fortells ;

Through the balmy air of night,

How they ring out their delight ;

From the molten-golden notes,

And all in tune,

What a liquid ditty floats

To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats

On the moon !

*(Edgar Allan Poe.)*

Quite a number of friends had assembled and the

evening. having passed merrily, we were ready to depart. Almost blinded by showers of confetti, we succeeded to escape from the ring which our friends had made around us and entering the car, drove to the station. Our home was at Chinsurah, a town situated about twenty-two miles away from Calcutta and about which I shall speak later. As the train which was taking me to my new home sped along, I sat by the window, gazing at the fields and villages that lay along our route. It would not be amiss for me to speak of the scenes through which we passed and which I had, in the nine years that I lived at Chinsurah, often noted while journeying from that town to Calcutta. I would notice the clumps of bamboo trees and the dark green foliage of the mango groves as also the thick bushes growing in profusion everywhere; the stagnant pools about whose fringes rank weeds grew, often obstructed the path to many a homestead. Throughout Bengal the cottages of the peasants lie hidden among the trees and bushes or are surrounded by clumps of plantain trees from whose tops hang in great bunches that succulent fruit and whose broad giant leaves wave their welcome to the traveller. Narrow rustic bridges span the water-courses, which sometimes surround the cottages of the husbandmen. In the fields grow their crops—the cow with her young, grazes undisturbed—the solitary goat picks at the shrubs, while the village dog threatens the stranger with its warning bark.

A vision flits across the cottage yard—it is the

Bengalee maid, that graceful creature endowed with a beauty of feature and form, worthy of the brush of a Titian or a Murillo. Devotion to parents and the aged, self-sacrifice and loyalty, are the attributes, of the women of India, perhaps rarely equalled in any other part of the world.

Along the route also lie dreamy little towns consisting of numerous structures, quaint and unconventional, yet suitable to the particular needs of the occupants and in this stretch of country lives the Bengalee, one of the most hospitable, courteous and gifted races of the East. In the far distance, tall masonry chimneys of busy mills and factories rear their heads and within whose walls numerous operatives find employment and recompense.

I must offer my apologies once again to my readers for having wandered from the main subject of my story.

The shrill whistle of the locomotive announced our arrival at Chinsurah, where getting down from the train, we entered a car which raced along the long road, on both sides of which lay patches of rank jungle and amidst which grew in wild confusion, a forest of trees. We now passed a number of humble cottages and dwelling houses of brick and then in a little while it brought us to the heart of the town. Turning sharply to the right, we entered a narrow lane, when suddenly before our eyes rose the tall steeple of a church. It was that of St. John surrounded by high walls and lofty trees. We pulled up in front of a large massive gate whose

entire surface was studded with small brass discs, a quaint gate indeed, and which was opened by the gardeners who respectfully saluted their master and his young bride.

As we stepped into the courtyard, I gazed at the noble edifice, surrounded as it was by the graves of the departed and some distance away stood the parsonage, which was to be my home. Fruit trees and flowering plants grew everywhere—a pretty home ! I thought to myself. Entering the church I uttered a prayer before proceeding to our quarters. Throughout the day the wind blew through the branches of the trees ; the chattering of wild parrots, the cooing of pigeons and doves and the sweet tender notes of the ‘coel’ all lent a charm to this retired spot ; and when darkness set in, the cry of the jackal disturbed the serenity of the night. The din and clamour of a large and busy city were entirely absent in this peaceful retreat. At sunrise the varied notes of numerous birds around, roused me from sleep and I stepped into the garden to breathe the pure delicious air, with the dew lying thick on the leaves and grass. I would often look at the sun-dial, that had been placed in the garden nearly two centuries ago, to see at what hour I had risen, but the sun’s rays had not yet fallen on its face. The lilies and the roses were wet with dew and the air sweet with the scent of flowers. All around were the coconut trees with their fruit clustered round the tops of their lofty trunks, while the bushes in the garden thickly overlaid with white blossoms, appeared as though

covered with snow. Just a few paces away stood the old Church of St. John, the sun's rays gilding its quaint fluted steeple. As I wandered through these peaceful scenes, they filled me with happiness and I would return to our quarters refreshed and contented.

I shall now endeavour to give as briefly as I can, a sketch of this exceedingly interesting town, not omitting to mention a few of its remarkable features and of the splendid structures it contains. I shall also give a short sketch of some equally interesting monuments of the past, which exist in the towns of Bandel and Hugli situated a few miles away.

How have these little towns, unknown to many, neglected and rarely visited and hidden away in a secluded part of Bengal, come to possess such noble buildings and historic institutions that would be deemed worthy of gracing even some great city of the world? One must refer to a period of about three centuries back in order to obtain light regarding this most interesting period of Bengal's history.

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## CHAPTER XXVII

Portuguese settlements at Satgaon and Hugli—Chinsurah—Some of its historic buildings and sites—The oldest church in Bengal—Fort Augustus and Dutch supremacy—The famous Dutch factory and the old Dutch church—Court of Dupleix at Giretti House (the “French Gardens”)—Residence of M. Perron, a general in the service of Scindia—The Imambara.

During the reign of our “Good Queen Bess” the contemporary of Akbar the Great, the eyes of the maritime nations of Europe were turned in the direction of India and the Far East.

The Portuguese, that small but adventurous race, were the first to establish commercial settlements in Bengal, their earliest being Satgaon on the river Saraswati and for which they obtained charters from the Mogul court at Delhi; Satgaon was however later superseded by Bandel. The monopoly of trade which they enjoyed brought wealth and prosperity to the merchants who had settled in this town and which grew into a place of considerable importance. A church, the oldest in Bengal, known as the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, with a monastery attached, was erected at Bandel in 1599 by the Augustinian Friars. The Portuguese having however incurred in later years the displeasure of the Emperor Shah Jahan, the settlement was attacked by the Moguls and destroyed, its Christian inhabitants being either put to the sword or carried away into captivity. The church was consumed by fire, but rebuilt in 1660 and stands

to day as the sole survivor of the once flourishing settlement of Bandel. This edifice lies pleasantly on the banks of the river. In front of a grassy court surrounded by cloisters, stands a rock grotto dedicated to the Lady of Lourdes and on the roof of the building, accessible by a stairway, is placed the statue of the Lady of Happy Voyage, which is believed by devout Catholics to have been miraculously washed ashore by a storm. For near three centuries the afflicted have come to beseech her aid, and pilgrims from distant places visit the church to make vows and invoke her intercession. A room near the gateway contains relics and in which may be seen an old charter from the Court of Delhi written in the beautiful Persian script with the imperial seal affixed on it.

The next to follow in the wake of the Portuguese were the Dutch, who having obtained a grant from the Mogul Court, erected in 1656 a fort at Chinsurah known as Fort Augustus, within whose massive stone boundary walls, stood the residence of the Dutch Director as also those of his councillors, military officers and civil officials. Goutier Shouten who visited it in 1665 speaks of it thus :—"There is nothing in it (Hugli) more magnificent than the Dutch factory .....It has indeed more the appearance of a large castle than of a factory of Dutch merchants." Thomas Bowry, an Englishman, who visited Fort Augustus says :—"It is the largest and completest Factory in Asia." The walls were of stone, 15 feet high, and the warehouses solidly built, also of stone ; villas with well-kept gardens lay on the river bank, the

settlement extending for a little over a mile in length and about a mile in breadth.

Under the ægis of the Dutch Company flourished a settlement of Armenian merchants who erected the Church of St. John the Baptist, of which more anon. Upon the Dutch factory and settlement finally passing over by treaty to the British in 1825, most of the buildings within as also the fort walls, were, with the exception of the Director's residence, the church and a few structures, dismantled. The Director's house is now the residence of the Commissioner of the district, a stately edifice standing upon extensive grounds and commanding a fine view of the river and surrounding country ; it has an imposing staircase, near which is a tablet inscribed with the letters O.V.C. which mean "Ostendiche Vereenigde Companie," i.e., the United East India Company. Near this building are ranges of barracks that once accommodated the officers of the Dutch forces, but now occupied by British officials, a number of Government offices and the Law courts.

At the extreme end of the main barracks is the residence of the District and Sessions judge, the rest of the range of buildings being occupied by Government officials, the courts and the library. Other ranges of barracks are similarly set apart for various Government departments. The old Dutch church is situated near the barracks and close to the banks of the river. It is octagonal in shape, has no steeple, though known to have possessed one which was blown down in the cyclone of 1864. In the interior of the building a number of escutcheons hang from the



walls and which bear the coats of arms of Dutch governors and other notables. When Fort Augustus was acquired from the Dutch in 1825 the church too passed over to the British.

Not far from Champdany is the village of Giretti near which are the ruins of Giretti House, the residence of the Governors of the French settlement at Chandernagore. Within this historic building the proconsuls of France held brilliant court and here too many a woman of beauty and culture and gracefully garbed received homage from her admirers, but a death-like stillness now reigns within its crumbled walls. Dupleix is said to have built Giretti House in about 1770 which was then also called the "French Gardens".

Among the old landmarks of Chinsurah, I must not omit to speak of that imposing building, the Hugli College, situated within large grounds and lying on the river bank, with a broad flight of steps leading down to it. It was built by M. Perron, a French General in the service of Scindia, who at that time was the most powerful of the Mahratta chiefs. Perron later discovering that he had become an object of court intrigue and that his enemies were encompassing his downfall, made overtures to Lord Lake in 1803 to permit him to seek asylum in British territory. This request having been complied with, Perron later proceeded to Bengal where he lived for one and a half years at Chandernagore in affluence before finally returning to France. It possesses an excellent library and is indeed a building worthy of any large city.

With the exception of the Armenian Church of St. John at Chinsurah, I have completed my picture of the old time edifices which existed in those stirring times.

Of the comparatively recent structures, I come now to that imposing mosque of the Shia sect of Mussalmans, the Inambara of Hugli. A lofty gate with two towers on either side, admits the visitor to a large rectangular court. Over the gateway is a clock with numerals in Arabic characters and in the courtyard is a large reservoir containing goldfish. Ranges of rooms for the accommodation of students, teachers and the faithful, run along the two sides of the rectangle, while in front stands the mosque itself, well raised from the level of the court. The floors are paved with slabs of polished marble and the walls and columns ornamented with texts from the Koran in the beautiful Arabic script. From the decorated ceilings hang chandeliers and at one end of the hall is the mihrab or pulpit, richly ornamented. In front are what appear to be tombs covered over with silken palls. East of the courtyard are the living rooms and offices of the Motavali who receives office under a Deed of Trust executed by Mohammed Moshin Khan, the founder of the Inambara. Adjoining is a garden containing several tombs, among which are those of the Foujdar Mirza Sala-ud-din Mohamed Khan the Mogul military governor, his wife Manu Jan Khanum, and of Mohamed Moshin Khan himself.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

The church of St. John—The Armenian settlement  
—Job Charnock and the merchants of Chinsurah—  
Flowers and fruit groves—Fourfooted and winged  
dwellers within the grounds—The langur or hunuman.

I shall refer once again to the Church of St. John. I have already remarked that the Armenian settlement at Chinsurah came into existence during the period of Dutch supremacy in that part of Bengal ; in 1695 the Armenian merchants of that town built a church dedicating it to St. John the Baptist. It does not possess the stately proportions and architectural grace of the edifices of the West, nor does its interior boast of any decorative beauty. No stained glass windows illumine it and no delicate frescoes or tracings ornament the walls and columns ; neither are there any sacred statues of bronze or stone nor paintings by celebrated masters, to embellish its walls. Its charm lies in its utmost simplicity, its old time associations and in its peaceful surroundings.

Not many years had passed when Chinsurah as a flourishing centre of trade ceased to exist, being supplanted by Calcutta which at that time was merely a cluster of large villages. The reason for the austere simplicity of this church is not far to seek, for those were insecure days. The Moguls had already destroyed the Portuguese settlement of Bandel ; Mahratta horsemen frequently raided the peaceful villages of Bengal, while England, France and Holland contended

with one another for the supremacy of trade of the rich province of Bengal. At the invitation of Job Charnock, the Armenian merchants departed from Chinsurah to establish in Calcutta a new centre for their trade and commerce. The one-time numerous parishioners of the town dwindled down in the course of about two and a half centuries, to two forlorn individuals, my husband and myself. Above the altar of this church are two paintings in oil, one depicting the "Last Supper" and the other the 'Crucifixion' executed by an Armenian artist. The life-like expression on the countenances of the participants of that mystic supper, prove him to be an artist of no mean order. The steeple and the belfry were added later and the old gates with those brass discs covering their surface, aroused the interest of the late Lord Curzon of Kedleston who visited this church during his viceroyalty in India. The parsonage contains a sufficient number of rooms and in the garden stands an old-time sun-dial resting upon a masonry pillar. In front of the parsonage is the garden and all around are tombstones which bear inscriptions in classical Armenian; beneath one of these stones is buried a descendant of a prince of Armenia, who had come to India to seek his fortune. A portion of the garden contains bushes bearing white, yellow and red roses together with beds of lilies which scent the air with their sweet perfume—these I would pluck to place before the church altar. Altogether a dear little church, full of the sweet memories of the past !

And now let me speak about those feathered friends of ours, that lived happily among the trees and in the nooks and corners of the buildings, feeding undisturbed on the ripe fruit of the garden. Four-footed creatures too, roamed among the grave-stones or lurked behind the bushes that grew so thickly everywhere. Flying foxes could be seen hanging motionless from the branches and the nimble squirrel darted from bough to bough. The owl perched on the branches hooted ominously, while the toad croaked harshly as evening drew near—then the butterflies, beetles and other winged insects added variety and charm to the scene around; in the gloom of night fireflies flitted from grave to grave. The grounds beyond the garden were infested with snakes, some harmless and others poisonous, for the dreaded karait and the cobra often glided past. And when night drew near, the jackal emitted its piercing cries often within a few feet of my window. Lastly a colony of 'hunumans' or monkeys would daily visit us, scampering along the parapets of the buildings or squatting with quiet defiance on the branches.

Amid scenes such as these did our life pass from day to day with no variation to relieve its monotony. After a time the wearing sameness of this existence was beginning to tell upon me but I would try to overcome the feeling of loneliness which oppressed me by reflecting that Providence had given as compensations, the sweet song of birds, the purity and freshness of the air, the flowers and the delicious fruits of the garden. Amidst the serenity of this holy retreat, peace and

repose reigned from day to day. Let me speak once again of the brighter side of this picture and give in some detail the habits of the birds and other living creatures that inhabited this retreat.

It was the happy hunting ground of numerous wild pigeons, some with ordinary plumage and others beautifully marked and they would come and settle down on the courtyard in search of grain. Upon hearing the flutter of their wings, I would call out to them and no sooner did they spy me than they collected together and flew towards me ; so trusting had they become that they did not seem to fear me but would often come up and crowd round my feet and sometimes even alight for a brief moment upon my shoulders. I had a number of domesticated pigeons and one could not help but notice how they kept aloof from their wild cousins. A pair of doves had made their nest in a nook of the church building—later I noticed two such pairs—they too would alight on the ground and pick at the grain I had scattered. Below the belfry and facing the main door of the church hangs a large square lamp with openings below and which having survived its utility, had remained disused for years.

I happened one morning to pass by, when I discovered a pair of doves within this lamp and in which they had made their nest. I could not help but wonder how these two innocent creatures, emblems of meekness and love, had come to choose this spot above any other, to keep watch over the doorway of this sacred edifice, murmuring ever to each other of their undying

love. The myna and the bulbul often dropped in to see us—and then those tiny creatures, robin-like, prettily marked, would come in clusters chirping earnestly and seeming as though they were discussing matters of great moment, then after having come perhaps to some unanimous decision, would take wing and disappear. In the countryside may be seen a bird of the richest plumage, the kingfisher, which I longed to capture. A stray hawk would occasionally be noticed darting across the sky in pursuit of its quarry. To watch the parrots chattering among the branches or on the ledges of the church building, was a pleasure indeed ; some were prettily marked with patterns like those on the butterfly's wing ; dozens would come and sit together, never keeping still, but fidgetting all the time with beak and claw. I often tried to get the gardeners to capture one but they proved to be too wary for them. Toads concealed themselves under the bushes, their harsh strident notes being however not unpleasant to the ear, for they seemed to harmonise with the quiet and repose of night. Another deep-throated visitor, the coal-black raven, would come at all hours of the day attracted by the decayed fruit that littered the ground ; its harsh croakings tinged with something indefinably sad, seemed to be in keeping with the peace that reigned in the grounds of this church. And as the shades of night closed in, fireflies flitted among the bushes and grave stones, imparting a sanctity and mystery to the scene around. As though in harmony with the gloom of night, a family of owls perched on a bough, watched over the dead and made

night hideous with their screechings and unearthly hootings.

“When blood is nipp’d and ways be foul,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl

To-who ;

Tu-whit, to-who.....”

*(Wm. Shakespeare.)*

Often at sunset, I would climb the stairs that led to the roof of the belfry where I would sit beguiling the hours with my needlework or in reading some book. Upon descending the stairs, a pair of large piercing eyes would stare at me from a big tree that grew near by. They were those of an owl, which bobbed its head up and down in a strange defiant manner, hissing viciously at me meanwhile. Unable to look into those uncanny eyes, I would turn my face away and hurriedly quit the spot. Meet companions of the owls were the flying foxes and bats that hung from the branches, thriving on the fruit of the garden. Having exhausted my list of the feathered tribe, I will now speak of those four-footed neighbours which chose to make their home within the boundary walls of St. John’s.

The district of Hugli is infested with monkeys of various species one of which, the hunuman or langur, is common, a creature having a dark grey coat, a long tail, gleaming white teeth, long slender body and small fierce eyes. For generations they have made their home among the trees or beneath the arches and recesses of the church building, feeding on the various fruits that abound in the garden and wantonly destroying as many more, for I often found good fruit barely eaten and



with only teeth marks on them. They were destructive in other ways too, for they would invade the garden, pluck the rose buds and tender shoots, bite and scatter them about. Often the she-hunumans would be found squatting all in a line upon the parapets. One that had no offspring of her own, would suddenly snatch from another's embrace her babe, just to fondle it, as though it were her own, but after a few moments, the mother was sure to quickly recover it from her. It often struck me how human-like were some of their ways—seldom quiet, they romped about all day, climbing up with the greatest ease, the steep iron ladder that led to the steeple, or leaping from branch to branch with unerring precision. The mothers while performing these daredevil tricks, cuddled their babes securely in their embrace and never did I know of an instance where either had come to grief. The male has a most vicious habit, for he persistently seeks to destroy his male offspring, jealous of the love his mother has for him. Her constant care is how to protect it from harm, but the father ever on the watch, tears it away from her embrace and should she attempt to rescue it, fiercely threatens her, following it up with a quick vicious slap, after which he puts an end to the little fellow's existence. On one occasion when I happened to be strolling near the church gate I saw a black-faced hunuman sitting on the porch roof ; I stared at him for a moment thinking that that was sufficient to scare him away, but he made a threatening lunge forward and barked savagely at me. I turned and ran towards my quarters, the brute

following me close behind. Fear lent wings to my feet and it was only when I reached my room door, that he retreated and disappeared. Had he caught me up he would assuredly have inflicted some nasty bites on me. When running, they bound along on all fours. their long arms and legs enabling them to cover ground quickly. At times during the day, the steeple bell would suddenly ring out—for some moments it puzzled us—"What could that be?" we wondered, for nobody except my husband, had the authority to ring the bell and in his absence from the church, myself. Soon however, we discovered that it was only one of the hunumans which had pulled the bell-chain out of sheer devilry.

I shall relate an amusing ineident that took place when a certain Mr. 'S' was in charge of St. John's. With him lived his worthy spouse and her brother; the latter happened one day to be in the garden with his hands clasped behind his back and his mind in a state of abstraction. Of a sudden he felt a tugging at his fingers; feeling sure that it was his brother-in-law up to practical jokes, he at first paid no heed to what was happening, but upon the tugging continuing, remarked petulantly, "Now don't!" Upon looking round however, he discovered to his discomfiture that it was not his playful brother-in-law, but a hunuman that had crept up from behind and had been pulling at his fingers.

Throughout the day the lively little squirrels frisked among the bushes or darted up and down the tree trunks with wonderful agility and the only time they

seemed to be quiet was, when for a few moments, they sat upright on their haunches holding in their tiny paws some tit-bit that they may have picked up. The civet cat sneaked along the boundary walls, often committing havoc in the poultry pen. I would notice at times the sleek mongoose, that redoubtable fighter, which glided past like a phantom, now entering and now emerging from the bushes—alert—as though seeking for his old time antagonist, the snake. In summertime when the flowers are in bloom, the bees hover over the blossoms and up among the branches are their combs stored with honey.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

Feast of St. John—Summer time—A sylvan retreat—  
When nature smiles—The sun-dial of olden days—The  
Muezzin's call to prayer—The Hindu priest at worship—  
Night—The jackal's cry—Snakes—I look after a troop  
of boys—Three lonely and miserable souls—Solitude.

A large number of people from Calcutta and elsewhere visit St. John's, to attend a special service held there every year in the month of January. At the conclusion of the service, lunch is provided in the courtyards and by evening the pilgrims depart, to meet perhaps once again on the same day of the succeeding year. A week before the feast day, we were kept busy from early morning till the late hours of the night, attending to the needs of the visitors, and on this day friends and relatives would meet, who perhaps had been separated for years. When all had departed we would miss their genial presence and resign ourselves once again, for twelve long months, to the solitude of this place. Several of my friends would wonder how I endured it so long and would sympathise with me and tell me, that had they been placed in the same situation as myself, they could not have stood it for even a week. Often in the cool of the mornings, I would wend my way to the river and sit in the Strand under the big trees, watching the boats being rowed across the river or noticing how they skimmed on the water like so many great birds. At times I would see a launch forge ahead,

which disturbed the water around and left a long trail behind. To my right lay the Dutch church, where once a month service is held and which I usually attended.

Nine years of my life passed in this manner with summer alone to cheer and brighten me. And how beautiful was summer ! Nature seemed to rejoice ! The crowing of the cock at dawn was the harbinger of a new morning and just before the sun rose, the birds awoke and twittered among the branches ; the mist melted away, leaving the dewdrops to glisten like pearls upon the leaves and petals. Soon the sun's golden rays shot through the branches and illumined the church spire, as also the face of that ever faithful servitor, the sun-dial of olden days. Overhead stretched the blue vault of the heavens with not a cloud to obscure its serenity ; the earth had wakened from her slumber, and the bees clustered around the hearts of the flowers ; butterflies flitted past and soon the whirr of wings announced the arrival of the wild pigeons. And when the sun had risen still higher in the heavens, the gay parrots, the bulbul, the woodpecker and other woodland birds added their notes to the harmony around. The soothing call of the 'coel' seemed to say "Be of good cheer ! Heaven wills that you should be in this place !" I would go to the garden to inhale the fragrance of the roses and lilies, to gladden my heart with the bloom upon the bushes, to watch the mottled butterflies flitting from bush to bush, with the squirrels gambolling beneath the trees. Beautiful indeed is this world we have been given to inhabit !

When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,  
Hath put a spirit of youth in everything.

*(Wm. Shakespeare—Sonnet.)*

And at midday I would once again wander in the grounds, taking with me my work-basket and a book, to sit in a shady spot with my cat or the dog Peggy, beside me. Directly they spied a squirrel, they would dart at it but only to miss it. The apes could now be seen either singly or in numbers, careering along the tops of the boundary walls or swinging from branch to branch. All around were the fruit trees in bloom, the white blossoms of the pomelo contrasting with the changing hues of the mango buds, making altogether a scene of the utmost charm. Where is the need I would often ask myself of those bitter strifes and jealousies among individuals and peoples, when Nature has given us such a beautiful world to live in? A feeling of contentment and resignation would come over me as I gazed at the beauteous scene around me. In this sylvan retreat and in the midst of my daydreams, my thoughts would wander to those I had lost in far-off Iran. I now found I had overstayed myself, and wondered what the hour was. There, only a short distance away, was the sun-dial of the garden. I would walk up to it and read the time and how correctly would it indicate the hour. I would rest my hand upon it, that silent and faithful friend, which has stood in this self-same spot for centuries, to guide and cheer the friendless and the lonely.

At sunset life and animation gradually ceased, the

birds retired to their nests and the apes sought repose in their accustomed nooks. Then would the bugle notes of the retreat, clear and resonant, sound from an outpost near-by. Immediately the twittering of the birds was hushed, the owls and owlets ceased for a time their meaningless screechings and the penetrating notes of that call though pleasant to the ear, yet roused in one thoughts of undefined sadness, for they seemed to bring to mind those countless thousands, who when on earth had heard and obeyed those commands, but now hear them no more. I too, would then quit the garden and return to my quarters.

A little before the bugle had sung its warning notes of rest, the Muezzin from a mosque near-by, in sonorous Arabic daily called the Faithful to prayer. To that same Power, the Brahmin blew the sacred conch from a temple not far away, repeating the while in the ancient Sanskrit tongue, verses in praise and adoration of the Creator, thus proving the unity of belief in a Supreme God amongst peoples of various creeds and nationalities, and the brotherhood of man.

The sky would at times assume those wondrous tints so common in the East and beloved of the landscape painter. And when darkness set in, a new life would begin, lasting through the greater part of the night, for then could be heard the startling and sickening cry of the jackal, the croaking of the toad and the hooting of owls. The moon, heaven's beacon, would then appear and together with the stars, illumine the church with a celestial light.

.How beautiful is night!

A dewy freshness fills the silent air ;  
No mist obscures ; nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain

Breaks the serene of heaven ;  
In full orb'd glory yonder moon divine

Rolls through the dark blue depths.

(*Southey*—“*Thalaba*”).

I have said before that it was my daily practice to stroll into the garden with my work-basket and a book. Suddenly a rustling sound would rouse me. “What is that?” I would ask myself. Glancing round I would see a snake glide past. “Could it be poisonous?” I would keep wondering. At other times while resting in some shady spot a sharp hissing sound would startle me! and there before me would appear a krait or a cobra! There was no mistaking them! Hurriedly I would make for my quarters and rouse the servants. Providing themselves with sticks, they would quickly come up and on several occasions were able to kill the unwelcome visitor. I cannot forget the narrow escapes I have had and shall relate an incident which occurred. I happened one day to be strolling about in a secluded part of the garden near the coconut and mango trees, humming a tune the while, and hardly looking at the path I was treading, when a sharp hissing sound startled me: “Dear Lord!” a couple of feet in front of me was a krait with its head erect, and eyeing me with its keen beady eyes! It seemed as though the creature resented my presence in forbidden ground. For an instant I stood irresolute, but quickly recovering myself, bounded away to my quarters. The gardeners ran up and though they looked for it everywhere, no trace of it could be found; they persisted however in their search and in the end discovered it concealed in a croton bush, where



they quickly despatched it. On other occasions too, we would come across this particular variety, which seemed more common than the cobra and the gardeners were generally able to make short work of them. I had other unpleasant experiences too, for on two occasions a krait dropped from the top of the window-sill on to the floor of my room, just a foot away from me and upon my raising an alarm, the servants quickly came up and killed it. My husband too, had once a very narrow escape. I had occasion to pay a short visit to Calcutta and it was arranged he should stay behind. At night as he lay asleep with the dogs lying at the foot of his bed, he was roused by their excited barking; hurriedly getting out of bed, he saw a cobra brush past his feet and like a flash, escape into the garden. The gardeners diligently looked for it among the bushes, but their search proved fruitless.

A variety of harmless snakes of a light green shade and measuring about a quarter of an inch across, infested the garden and courts. I would often come across them curiously stretched out on the ground basking in the sun, one behind the other in single file. So much then for those dreaded reptiles that lurked in the grounds of St. John's. They had so got on my nerves that when strolling in the garden, I would think they were near me; upon going into my room I would nervously look all round me, or when entering or rising from my bed, I felt as though one was lying concealed under it or had coiled itself under my pillow.

I should like to speak now regarding a few

events which had taken place during my stay at Chinsurah.

One day an individual, a Mr. H. announced himself at our place. He had come, he said, from Calcutta, having been sent up by the managers of the Armenian Academy there, with a message to us that in a few days a number of boys would be coming up, the reason being that there was an insufficiency of accommodation in the college building. Accordingly we secured a house attached to a small Roman Catholic church which stood just opposite St. John's and which had been built by the Portuguese, when they had their trading settlements in these parts of Bengal. A few days later a troop of fortyfive boys along with Mr. H., arrived at dusk at St. John's. I casually asked them how they liked the place and they replied "Madam, we don't like it at all!" Small wonder, for it must have struck them as being very lonely, surrounded as it was by old and ruined buildings and with the howling of jackals just beginning to sound in their ears. I was appointed to teach them English and to attend to their little wants, all of which I gladly consented to do, as these duties helped to keep me occupied; Mr. H. on the other hand attended to their general education and well-being. The idea with the school authorities was, that as each boy showed some progress, he would be sent back to Calcutta to go through a full course of studies there. Their presence in the Church grounds at recreation hours, brightened me and that oppressive sense of loneliness which I had to endure, soon passed away. Mr. H. however was miserable. He would

frequently complain that he felt as though he had been sent to a place of exile and would wonder how we stood it so long. He would put his hands to his forehead and shaking his head, exclaim "Oh ! this is unbearable ! —it's enough to drive one crazy !" Meanwhile owing to the crampiness of the rooms in which the lads were lodged, a few took ill, causing some concern to the College authorities. Accordingly a telegram arrived one morning, instructing Mr. H. to return with the boys to Calcutta at once. So after a stay of three months, the exiles were at last ready to depart ; glad tidings for them indeed, but not for me, for it meant that I would be soon losing my pupils and so be deprived of their cheery presence. As they collected round me, I questioned them, "Well boys, are you happy that you are returning to Calcutta tomorrow ?" "Yes Madam, we are very glad indeed ; we won't sleep to-night through joy !" they replied. Then on the morrow, as they were about to depart, three or four lads remarked to me "Madam, we wonder how you have managed to live in this lonely place ; may God give you patience to continue to do so !" I thought these words remarkable, coming as they did from lads of such tender ages. In a short while a bus arrived into which they trooped and as it sped along, they cheerily waved their hands to us for they felt they had regained their freedom at last. Then it came home to me that I was to be left once again in my golden cage. A few weeks later the Wardens of the Church in Calcutta, who control the affairs of St. John's, sent up an elderly individual, a Mr. M., to

serve as an assistant there. He too, found the loneliness unbearable but never once however, did he complain. All that he did was to quit his quarters four or five times a day and wander about the countryside, returning only for his meals and night's rest. He stayed for about a year at St. John's and then departed for good.

I now ask my readers to listen to a tale which I feel I should relate. Shortly after the departure of Mr. M., a young man was sent up in his place; he was quiet and reserved, well educated, the son of a clergyman, and had at one time been a teacher in a village school. In a few days the wearing sameness of the life which he was compelled to lead, began to tell upon his spirits. He however did not roam about the countryside as did his predecessor, but kept complaining only of the awful loneliness that oppressed him. His only recreations were a short stroll by the river bank or an occasional run by train to Calcutta. Often he would comment upon the remarkable patience we showed in enduring the life we led. One morning before sunrise, we noticed him perched high up in the arched recess of the church steeple, in which hang the big bells. "What are you doing there?" we questioned him; "beware of the owls and bats!" "I have come here" he replied, "to be away from that oppressive sameness—I want to be up and up—that relieves me somewhat!" "I wish I too could climb up so high" I remarked. Descending the steep ladder, he entered the courtyard and there again remarked to us, "I marvel at your patience! How have you managed to live here for so many years!

As for me, I feel I am going mad !” We then noticed tears rolling down his cheeks, and could not help but wonder how a sturdy man like him, had become so unnerved, as to be unable to control his feelings in the presence of others. A few weeks later, to his great relief, orders came for him to quit the place in order to take up an appointment elsewhere.

I have remarked before that in the church steeple are two bells of ponderous weight, which I had at times to ring. I eagerly sought to perform this duty and loved to hear their mellow tones. In the last year of my stay at St. John’s, on the occasion of its feast day, my husband having taken ill, I had the church doors opened and ascending the winding stairs that led to the balcony, succeeded with considerable effort to intonate the chimes correctly. I rejoiced too to perform this task ; it gave me comfort and peace and I felt as though I was communing with God.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

The storm—When the rain ceases—Rural scenes—A night of calm—A reverie—My departure from St. John's—Farewells—To the sorrowing—A parting message.

Summer had passed and with it the bloom upon the blossoms of the garden. The notes that issued from the throats of birds, were partially hushed, for the season of lowering clouds and torrential rain had come. The parched earth received adequate moisture, enriching the tints on the leaves of the trees and the grass in the fields and bringing God's gift to man, the fruits of the garden, to ripeness and perfection.

The thirsty earth soaks up the rain  
And drinks and gapes for drink again ;  
The plants suck in the earth and are  
With constant drinking fresh and fair.

*(Abraham Cowley.)*

And as the clouds gathered in the sky, the thunder roared like salvos of artillery, with the wind and rain contending for mastery. Flashes of lightning lit up the sky, and with unforewarned suddenness hailstones crashed against the windows, whitening the ground as with a mantle of snow. I felt a sense of comfort and repose, as I listened to the howling wind and observed the furious deluge of rain sweep across the garden, bending the crests of the tall and robust trees to submission. Surging and raging, the struggle of the giants gradually ceased, succeeded by that calm which follows when two contending foes lay down

their arms at the approach of night. The clouds then drifted away and the stars one by one began to peep from the immeasurable depths of space, amidst a silence as of devotions at evensong.

.....look how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold ;  
There's not the smallest orb, which thou behold'st,  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims :  
Such harmony is in immortal souls.

*(Wm. Shakespeare.)*

At dawn the earth awoke and when that sustainer of life and vitality, the sun, rose from behind the tall trees of the garden, its rays illumined the Church of St. John and its hallowed courts. The mystic silence that reigned throughout the night was now broken by the varied notes of birds, each uttering its own interpretation of Nature's song. The leaves of the trees and the grass in the garden with the rain-drops still clinging to their surface, glistened with a freshness and purity that gladdened the eye and heart. The rose petals and the tender leaves of the bushes, bruised by the violence of the storm, lay scattered upon the turf, while the birds upon the branches pruned their dripping feathers in the warmth of the sun.

A chorus of chuckling sounds in the yard would then strike our ear. It was the cock which had darted out from the pen, followed by the hens and chickens, joyous at the freshness of morning and the warmth of the sun's rays which had followed his gloomy confinement of the night before. With swelling breast

and crest proudly raised, preceded by a flapping of wings, he expressed his joy in shrill triumphant notes. And the cat sitting upon a twisted tree stump, her accustomed perch, performed her toilet with moistened paws as every good cat will do.

From year to year, scenes such as these, repeated themselves with unbroken regularity.

The beauty of the night within the church grounds is remarkable, for then Nature sleeps and all is hushed and still with the pale moon illumining with her soft rays the majestic steeple and casting a gentle halo over the graves of the departed, who sleep their last sleep under the protecting shadows of this ancient church. How long have they slept there? The inscriptions on the tombstones indicate that they were laid to rest more than two centuries ago. Rest in peace you long departed brothers and sisters, you are "not dead but only gone before". On a bright night I could easily distinguish from afar, the white rose from the red, the pinks and carnations from the cornflower or the lily, the lemon blossoms from those of other flowering plants. Perfect peace, purity and innocence reigned over the entire scene.

O holy Night ! from thee I learn to bear  
What man has borne before ;  
Thou layest thy finger on the lips of Care,  
And they complain no more.

*(Longfellow—Hymn to the Night.)*

Why do I chafe over the loneliness of my life when Heaven has bestowed upon me as compensations the companionship of birds, the loveliness and the perfume



of the roses and lilies, the pretty butterflies, the purity and freshness of the air and the innocence and sanctity of St. John's? Are not these gifts inestimable? I would ask myself. Wrapt in these reflections I would gaze at the peaceful scene before me, forgetful of everything that was happening around; thoughts of my beloved parents and little brothers would come to my mind; how could I ever forget them? their death has left a mark in my mind which can never be effaced. Suddenly a horrible piercing yell would startle me from my reverie. Was it an evil spirit, that lurking among the tombstones, had come to seize me? . . . . . No! it was the jackal's cry! Instantly it was answered by a chorus from the entire pack. I would then hastily retire to my room for safety.

When I came to this place I was still a girl and now having passed nine years of my life in this retreat, had entered into womanhood. Often in my quiet moments I would ask myself why it was that there existed so many who had been spared this life of solitude and lived surrounded by friends, in the midst of social amenities? This existence must have been ordained for me then, for some shortcomings on my part. If such be the cause, I should endure it and not complain. Then I would look into my past and go through a self-examination. Was I not, I reasoned, only a child when I left Iran to travel to India? I was always obedient, I remembered, to my parents and superiors, and when I married, I lived a life of quiet, attending throughout the day to my duties and ministering along with my

husband, to the needs of the church. I could not therefore, I felt, have done anything to have merited this life of exile. Then the thought suddenly came to me:-it is not for any shortcomings on your part, but only a test from Heaven which bestows or afflicts to put to proof one's patience and worthiness; whereupon a ray of hope and a feeling of strength and resignation would come over me and I thought it best to leave everything to my Maker who would do what was good for me.

And thou, too, whosoe'er thou art,  
That readest this brief psalm,  
As one by one thy hopes depart,  
Be resolute and calm.

Oh, fear not in a world like this  
And thou shalt know ere long,  
Know how sublime a thing it is  
To suffer and be strong.

*(Longfellow.)*

The solitariness and the lack of companionship had, however, told upon me, so a change was to take place in my life again, for I was to leave St. John's for good. My brother who had come from a distant town, assisted me to get ready to depart and accompanied me in the journey down. When the moment for my departure arrived, I looked around me to bid farewell to all that I was soon to leave for good. Adieu old home ! I repeated to myself, and adieu to you pretty flowers of the garden ! Farewell to you sweet birds that ever gladdened my heart with your song, and a farewell to you too, my wild parrots, pigeons and little squirrels ! One long farewell to you, my butterflies,

fireflies and croaking toads ! As for you, you hunnans, I also bid you good-bye, for though you were so fierce and terrifying, you never harmed me, but were as though a part and parcel of my existence. I will not omit to bid you goodbye too, you hooting owls and howling jackals, though you sickened and unnerved me often with your screechings and unearthly cries. But to you, you wily serpents that conceal yourselves in the grass, I will only say that I leave you with no regret, for it was you that kept me in such a constant state of dread during the long years that I lived at St. John's.

As I passed the courtyard, I gazed at the church that had all these years watched over me like a protecting mother. Entering its sacred portals, I stood in the middle of the nave and uttered a prayer. Adieu ! then, sweet Church of St. John, I leave you at last ! Upon approaching the gate, I noticed the pigeons and doves that had alighted on the grave-stones. The sight of these innocent creatures moved me profoundly, for they brought to my mind my little brothers sleeping their last sleep in far-off Iran. As the car moved off, I gave one last look at my old home, at the church with its lofty steeple and familiar bells and a feeling of unutterable sadness took possession of me. Then the thought came to me once again, as it had so often come before, that the trials and sorrows which I had undergone, were but part of the mystic plan of God.

One by one the familiar objects around me faded from view, and when we boarded the train which took

us away, I looked through the window and noted the landscape gradually melt away.

And now at the close of my life's story, I wish to utter a few parting words to such as are weary and sorrowful. Should there be any among you who is oppressed in mind, suffering misfortunes or the greatest of griefs, whatsoever their nature be, and feel that they are about to overwhelm you, pause for a moment and remember what a little girl, an orphan of nine has endured ; what bitter griefs, fears and dangers have been her lot, but how God in His infinite love and compassion, did extend His protecting hand and rescued that child from those perils. Had death come to claim her too in those desolate sands of Quarantina, there would have been neither parent, brother, sister or friend to minister to her in her dying moments.

• If this message should give hope and strength to to the sorrowing, I feel I have not suffered in vain. And now farewell !

THE END.



